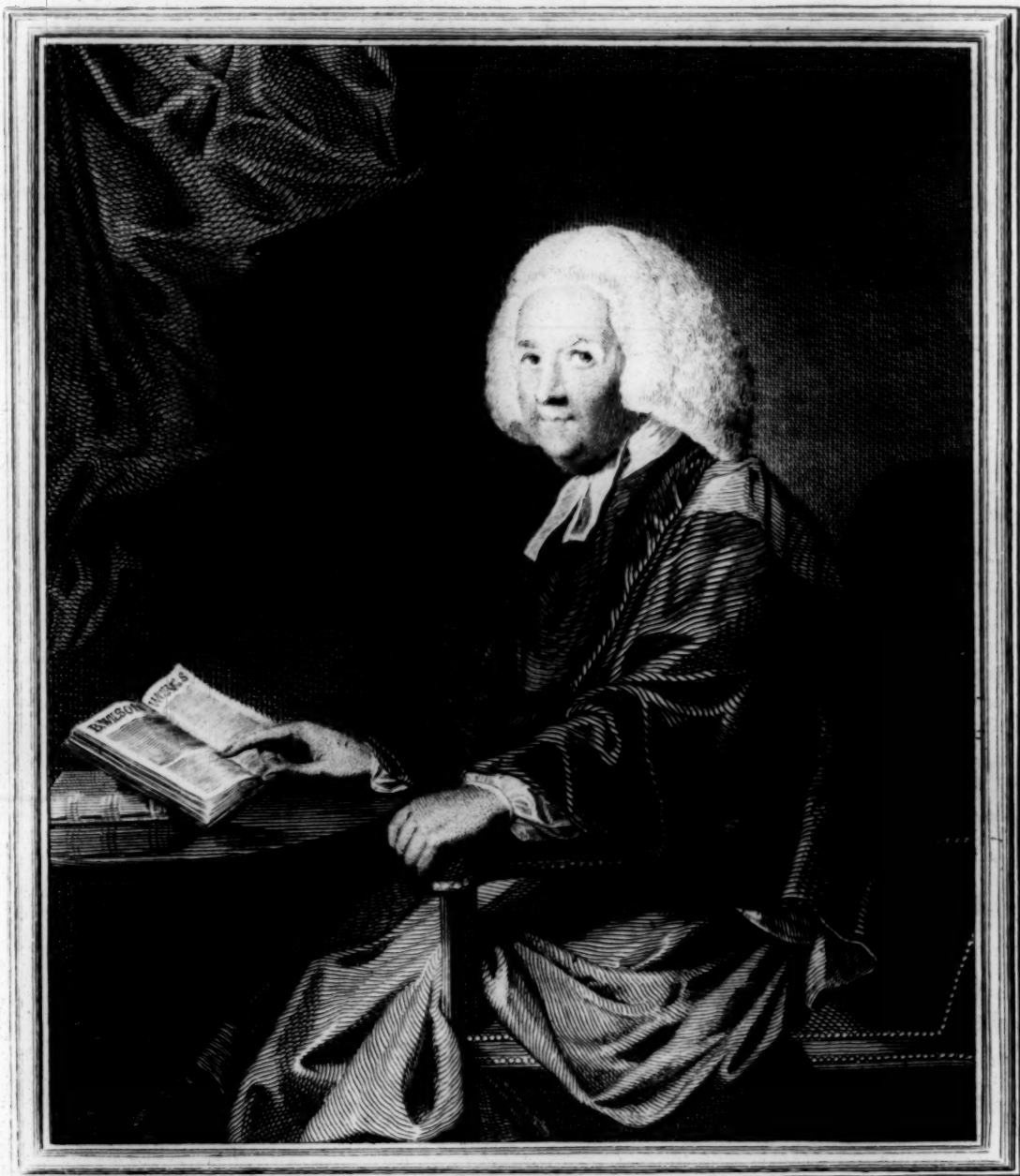




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T H E  
W O R K S  
O F

THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD

THOMAS WILSON, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN.

V O L U M E II.

S E R M O N S.

THE SECOND EDITION.

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THOUGH HE BE DEAD, HE YET SPEAKETH.

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M DCC LXXXII.



W O R K S

THE MESSRS. L. D.



THE MESSRS. L. D.



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1 THESS. iv. 13, 14. I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus (that is, in the faith of Jesus) will God bring with him. 472

S E R M O N XCVIII.

The proper Duty of Christians in general, and of the Ministers of Christ in particular.

JOHN xvii. 4. I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. 477

S E R M O N CXIX.

St. Paul's Comfort in the Prospect of Death applicable to every faithful Minister of Christ.

PHIL. i. 21. For to me to live is Christ; and to die is Gain. 482

S E R M O N C.

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PSALM. cxii. 6. The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance. 487

PRAYER





## P R A Y E R before the S E R M O N.

**A**LMIGHTY GOD, Maker of all things, Judge of all men, graciously receive the supplications and prayers of this congregation, for themselves and for all estates and conditions of men.

Lord, in mercy, grant unto us, and unto all sinners, a true sense of our errors, and grace to amend whatever we have done amiss, that iniquity may not be our ruin. Let not those judgments fall upon us which our sins have justly deserved: And grant that thy great mercy and forbearance may oblige us to bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

Have mercy upon the work of thy hands, that all the world may come to the knowledge of Thee, and of thy goodness in Jesus Christ. That all who are weary with the burthen of their sins, may know where to find rest unto their souls.

Preserve thy Church in the midst of this uncertain world, and prepare her for what thy providence shall bring forth, that neither prosperity may corrupt thy faithful servants, nor adversity discourage them from professing the truth.

Keep this Church and Nation in the peaceable enjoyment of thy Word and Sacraments; and grant that we may all live answerable to the means of grace which thy providence hath afforded us.

Bless all the reformed Churches; keep them from all wicked and dangerous errors; and bring into the way of truth all such as have gone astray; that thy Kingdom, and the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, may be glorified.

O God! whose Kingdom ruleth over all, bless these Nations to which we belong; that peace, and truth, and justice, that true religion and piety, may be secured and countenanced; that all ignorance and profaneness, and whatever else opposeth thy Divine Will made known to us, may be effectually discouraged.

To this end we pray God to hear us, for the King's Majesty, that his days may be many, his government happy, his commands just and equal, and his people faithful and obedient:—For the Royal Family, that we may be blessed with a succession of Princes fearing God:—For all such as are in council and authority, (and especially for the High Court of Parliament) that they may consult the honour of God, the true interest of his Church, and the welfare of the People:—For the Bishops and Pastors of Christ's flock, that they may constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke and oppose vice, and be living examples of those graces and virtues which they recommend to others: And the Lord Jesus Christ be always with them according to his promise; and grant unto the people of their flocks, that they may profit by them daily.

Blessed God and lover of souls, preserve, by thy grace, those that are in the way of life; enlighten the minds of the ignorant; awaken the consciences of the careless; silence the gainsayers; convert the profane; and bring them all to thine everlasting kingdom.

*For the Isle of Man.*] Bless the Lord and Government of this Isle; continue to us the blessings of peace and unity, in church and state, which we enjoy; preserve us from all false doctrine and every false way, and root out all growing vices, that there may ever be in this place a generation fearing God, and working righteousness.



*In Time of War.]* Preserve this land ; and, in thy own good time, deliver all Christian countries from the miseries of war ; scatter the people that delight in it ; and grant that such as fall, die not in their sins unrepented of.

*For City, or Corporation.]* Bless the Magistrates and Government of ———, and the lawful industry of its inhabitants. Let brotherly love and charity increase amongst them ; and root out all growing evils.

*Sea.]* Receive into thy Almighty and gracious protection the persons and the ships of those that are absent ; preserve them from the dangers of the seas, from the violence of enemies, and from all sad accidents ; that they may return in safety, to enjoy the fruits of their labours, and to praise the Lord for his mercies to them.

*At a Funeral.]* Make us all mindful of our latter end, that death may never overtake us unawares ; teach us, in the many spectacles of sorrow, sickness, and mortality, which we behold, to see how frail and how uncertain our condition is, that we may seriously apply our hearts unto that holy and heavenly Wisdom, whilst we live here, which may in the end bring us to life everlasting.

*For Plenty.]* Visit the earth and the seas with thy blessing ; and open the hearts of those upon whom thou shalt bestow these favours, that they may do good and distribute : And give us all grace, that we may not be corrupted by thy blessings.

We commend unto the tender mercy of God, all sick and dying persons, all that are in affliction of mind or body, or under any pressing calamity ; all that are poor, and have none else to help them ; and especially all such as suffer persecution for a righteous cause.

Lord, pity and sanctify the miseries of this life, to the everlasting benefit of all that suffer ; that the tears of the oppressed, the pains of the afflicted, the wants of the poor, may all help forward, and end in, the salvation of their immortal souls.

We beseech God to hear our prayers for all those that never pray for themselves, that they may see the danger, before it is too late, of living without God in the world.

And God Almighty grant, that we may all of us have worthy thoughts of his Majesty, for his great power in creating us,—for his wonderful providence in preserving us,—for his great goodness in redeeming us by Jesus Christ ; for whose doctrine and example, and for the examples of all his faithful servants, we pray God make us truly thankful, and grant us grace so to follow their steps, that we with them be made partakers of a blessed resurrection.

That we may obtain these blessings, and whatever else is needful for us, let us all join, and, with one heart and voice, pray to God in that perfect form of words which Jesus Christ hath taught us :—

*Our Father, which art in Heaven ; hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy Will be done in Earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation ; but deliver us from evil : For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.*





## S E R M O N I.

THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY GOD'S WORD READ OR  
PREACHED.

VOUCHSAFE, O God, to direct me in this Work, and bless this Discourse for the Good of my Flock; that both I and they may glorify Thee for the Truths they shall hear. Render them tractable and obedient to thy Word, and me faithful in delivering it; that I may save myself, and them that hear me, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

L U K E viii. 18.

*Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.\**

**G**OOD Christian People; I am going to set before you—the great blessing of attending to the Word of God, whether read or preached to you, and the true way of profiting thereby; as also, the very great hazard you run, of living under the light of the Gospel, and the ordinances of God, and not being bettered by them.

There is nothing more certain, than that many Christians are eternally ruined for want of considering the truths they hear every Lord's Day, and by not laying them to heart.

They come, indeed, to the Church; and they hear the Scriptures read to them. They hear what God commands, and what He requires of them. They are put in mind of what must certainly come hereafter; of *death, of judgment, of heaven, and of hell.* And yet they return home as little affected, as if these things were not true, or as if they did not at all concern them. And what is the consequence of this? Why, they are called Christians, *though they do not the things which Christ hath commanded them.* They hope for salvation, without being converted; and under this delusion they die, and go into eternity.

To prevent this destructive consequence, our Lord has given this following strict charge to all his followers: TAKE HEED HOW YE HEAR. *Take heed, for your salvation depends upon it, that you remember, and make good use of, what you hear: FOR WHOSOEVER HATH, that is, hath benefited by what he hath already heard, God will*

*increase his knowledge and his graces: BUT WHOSOEVER HATH NOT, that is, have not minded what they have heard, or have not profited by it; such are unworthy of more favours, and, by a just judgment of God, will be deprived of the knowledge and graces which they seemed to have.*

TAKE HEED, therefore, HOW YOU HEAR; that is, whether you come prepared to hear with a *serious, teachable* temper; with a purpose to *learn* your duty, and to *practise* what you hear.

TAKE HEED HOW YOU HEAR:—And that you hear those only who, by the order and providence of God, are appointed to instruct you. Never sure was more need of this caution. *Many deceivers, saith the Apostle, are entered into the world; many lewd, profane, and antichristian books; many agents of Satan, and seducing spirits; and therefore beware and avoid them as you love your souls.*

Lastly; TAKE HEED HOW YOU HEAR. Remember whose *Ministers* you hear, whose *word*, whose *commands*, whose *promises*, whose *threatenings*, you hear. They are not the words of man, but the *Word of God*, delivered by his *own Son*, confirmed by *miracles*, and reported to you by *his own Ministers*.

It may be you imagine, that you know your duty as well as the preacher who is appointed to instruct you. Be it so. But remember, that, whatever *his* talents and *yours* may be, *he is a Minister of God to you for*

\* See Mark iv. 9. Heb. ii. 1, 2, 3, 4. James i. 21. 1 Theff. ii. 13. iv. 1.



good, if you hear and obey his godly admonitions. And remember too, that the most eloquent, learned man on earth cannot edify you without God's blessing. And lastly, that God *has* made, and *can* make, his Word, out of the mouth of the meanest of his Ministers, effectual for the conversion of those that hear them with reverence.

Well then; whoever hopes to benefit by hearing, must come with *humility*, and a *teachable temper of mind*; must resolve to receive *instruction, reproof, and advice*, as coming from God; and must strive to remember what he hears.

It will *startle* you, and, I hope, will *affect your hearts*, to hear the true reason why the generality of people do not profit by Sermons, and by the Word of God read to them. It is not I, but JESUS CHRIST, who tells you, that "the Seed is the Word of God:" that "those by the way-side are they that hear. Then cometh the Devil;" *beserve that*, "then cometh the Devil, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."

You see who it is that tempts you to sit down with indifference, when the Word of God is read or spoken,—who it is that suggests to your mind other matters when you should be attending to the things which concern your souls: You hear from Christ himself, that it is the Devil, and that the end thereof is damnation. Let this dreadful truth, I beseech you, oblige you *at this time*, and at all times, to hearken with attention to the Word of God. And remember what our Lord said to those that heard his Word, and would not mind it: "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for you."

It behoves you therefore, as ever you hope to escape this dreadful judgment; it concerns you, I say, to come to Church with a teachable temper, with a sincere desire, whether to learn, or to be put in mind of your duty. It concerns you to hear with an humble, attentive mind, and with a full purpose of heart to order your life accordingly; and then the Word you hear will become indeed, what St. Paul calls it, *the Word of Salvation to every one that believeth*.

And that you may always attend to what is written in the Gospel with the greatest regard, and assurance of being true and certain,—take notice of and remember what was declared by GOD himself in a voice from Heaven, *This is my beloved Son, hear ye him*.

It is not a poor, ignorant creature, as I am, who tells you WHAT YOU MUST DO TO BE SAVED—what you must do to escape

eternal misery; but it is the *Son of God himself*, sent from Heaven for *this very end*—to shew unto us the way to life everlasting. It is Him you hear, when you hear his Word; and it is Him you disregard, when you mind not what is said to you by his Ministers.

But then, because it is not sufficient for a man to hear the truths of the Gospel, unless through the grace of God he applies them to himself, and considers how much he himself is concerned in them, and that otherwise he will be little the better for hearing the Word read or preached; I will, therefore, shew you how the most plain and unlearned Christian may and ought to apply the things he hears, every one to himself, and put them in practice. I will also shew you, how the truths you hear may always suggest to your minds suitable petitions, in order to obtain the grace of God, without which *all* you hear, *all* you know, will signify nothing towards your salvation.

For example:

Suppose the Sermon you heard was concerning THE DANGER OF INCONSIDERATION, or the sad effect of that little care and concern which the generality of Christians have for their salvation.

Such a serious subject, if you mind it, must needs affect you; and you will be apt to say within yourself,—'I see plainly, that if I pass my days in a wretched, negligent manner, without taking care of my soul, without considering what will come hereafter, whether I think of it or not, I can expect nothing when I die but misery everlasting. I see plainly, that I must not satisfy myself with the bare name of being a Christian, without considering what the Christian Religion requires of me. If I do so, I shall be dealt with worse than an heathen. God himself has declared, that great will be the punishment of wicked men; and great the reward, great the happiness, of such as fear to offend him, of such as are careful to obey his commands. And shall not this awaken me? Shall I go on, and live as if no harm would follow? Will not inconsideration ruin me, as well as if I were guilty of the greatest crimes? I take all possible care of my worldly concerns, and to avoid temporal evils; and shall I not be concerned for evils that will last for ever? It is true, I see others as little concerned as I am myself; but will this be any comfort to me, if we are all miserable at the last?

'I should be astonished to hear a man say, that *he does not believe one word of the Gospel*: and yet, it is plain, it will be the same thing





' thing in the end—with those that have not  
' believed one word of the Gospel, and with  
' those that have not laid the truths of the  
' Gospel to heart. I am resolved, therefore,  
' what I will do: I will go home, and beg  
' of God to touch my heart with a lasting  
' sense of the danger I am in; that he will  
' give me great concern for my soul; and  
' that he will not suffer me to lead a careless  
' life any longer.'

And you will be confirmed in these good purposes, if you shall be so happy (for so the providence of God often orders matters for our good) if you shall be so happy, as in some other Sermon to be put in mind of *the wretched condition of one who leads a careless and a sinful life*; and this both with respect to himself and to God.

If, for example, you have been plainly told, *what you cannot but know to be true*, That a person who leads a careless and a sinful life, can never be truly easy, or pleased with himself;—that he is always doing that which he inwardly condemns;—that he is afraid of that light which would let him see the danger he is in;—and that though he has often proposed to lead a new life, yet he has as often neglected to do so.

If you have been told, *what is as true as the Gospel*, that while you live in wilful sin, there is not the filthiest creature so odious in your eyes, as you are in the eyes of God;—that you are governed by the Devil, and are in his service, and doing his work;—that every moment you put off your repentance, *you are despising the goodness and long-suffering of God*, who continues your life for no other end, but that you may not be damned. If you hear, and are not startled at this, *it is because you are given over to a reprobate mind*.

Every man, who is not *so given over*, will certainly be afraid for himself; and if he hears a sermon concerning REPENTANCE, and a sinner's return to God, he will probably come to some such resolutions as these:—

' I am convinced, *from God's own Word*,  
' that a sinner has no other choice but either  
' *Repentance or Damnation*. As long, there-  
' fore, as I have no hopes of pardon, I can  
' have no comfort in life: And as long as I  
' defer my repentance, I can have no hopes  
' of pardon. And I see plainly, *from what*  
' *I have heard this day*, that my Repentance  
' will signify very little, if I do not bring  
' forth fruits answerable to amendment of  
' life. Is it not a great mercy, that God  
' will accept of a sinner's repentance, after  
' he has done so many ill things? Is it not  
' great condescension in the Son of God to

' give us even his oath, that ALL SINS SHALL  
' BE FORGIVEN UNTO THE SONS OF MEN;  
' and that none ought to despair of mercy,  
' but such only as will not be persuaded to  
' forsake their evil ways? What a mercy is  
' it that I have time to REPENT, *and to bring*  
' *forth fruits meet for repentance*! And what  
' a foolish, what a wretched creature should  
' I be, if I should neglect such a mercy, and  
' go on in my sins, and to my destruction?  
' I will therefore, *through the Grace of God*,  
' not defer my repentance for one moment,  
' lest I be overtaken in sin, and be for ever  
' undone.'

Some such (one would hope) would be the thoughts and the resolutions of any one who with attention had heard a sermon concerning *the necessity of repentance and a new life*.

A Christian that reasons thus, and thus resolves, and acts accordingly, *is in the way of Salvation*. But that he may continue in that way, he will want to be often put in mind—of the danger of *backsliding*;—of the duties required of *him, of every man*, in that state of life in which the providence of God has placed him;—of the *sins* he is chiefly to watch against;—and of the *means of grace* which God has appointed to bring us to Heaven.

For instance:—You will hear THE DUTY OF PRAYER pressed upon all Christians, as necessary to their salvation as their daily bread is to preserve their lives.

Will you return home without laying this to heart? You may, indeed, do so; but if you have any concern for your own soul, you will think better of it, and reason with yourself after some such manner as this:—

' I now see the great sin of neglecting so  
' necessary a duty as is this of *Prayer*. I see  
' plainly, that I must renounce all pretence  
' to religion, all hopes of salvation, if I  
' neglect it any longer. I am convinced,  
' that all the sins I ever committed, and  
' which I have not confessed and begged  
' pardon for, do stand in judgment against  
' me. And what will become of me if I  
' die in this condition? And I have all the  
' reason in the world to believe, that God  
' will withhold his blessings from me, if I  
' do not give him thanks for those I have  
' already received. I have no reason to  
' hope for God's protection and blessing upon  
' myself, upon my children, or upon my  
' labours, when I never pray for them. I  
' am as subject to afflictions, to troubles, to  
' calamities, as other people: How shall I  
' bear them with patience without the assis-  
' tance of God's grace? How shall I escape  
' the many temptations to wickedness which  
' I meet with daily, without praying for  
God's



' God's help and direction? In short, if I neglect this duty, how shall I escape eternal misery?

' I am resolved what to do. I will, by the grace of Almighty God, omit this duty of prayer no longer, lest I come short of heaven, and be for ever undone. I will, as I have been instructed, take all occasions of praying to God. When I set about any business of moment, I will pray him to prosper my honest endeavours.— Whenever I shall perceive that I have done any thing amiss, I will forthwith pray God to forgive me, and to give me grace to do so no more. If I am in trouble, or in distress, I will apply to the Father of mercies, and God of all comfort. If I am in any danger, I will pray him to deliver me. If I am tempted to any sin, I will beseech him to succour me. And I will not fail to give him thanks, whenever he bestows any blessing upon me.

' By doing this I shall be entitled to the favour and protection of God, and be always afraid of offending him.

' But this is not all; for I am resolved, by the grace of God, to pray with my family, and for my family, every day, as ever I expect God's blessing to be with them, and myself. By this means, I shall put them under God's protection every morning and evening;—I shall set them a good example of piety;—and this is the only way to make my children and servants *serious, holy, honest, and diligent*. And I will, by God's help, do this faithfully, though I should be so unlearned as to be able to say no other prayer but the Lord's Prayer:—I will hope God will hear me *according to the full meaning of that prayer*, if I say it devoutly upon my knees, and with my family.

' This will not hinder my worldly business; and I will trust in God, that he will doubly pay me for the loss of any time I spend in his service.'

Every serious Christian, who wishes well to his own soul, will, I say, *think and resolve*, when he has heard a sermon concerning *the Duty of Prayer*, after some such manner as this we have been speaking of.

Let us again suppose, that the sermon which you have heard has been concerning *the Meaning, and Benefit, and Duty, of receiving THE LORD'S SUPPER*. A serious person can hardly choose but make some such observations and resolutions as these:—

' I have this day been invited to partake of the Lord's Supper;—an ordinance appointed by Christ himself, and for this reason,—That Christians being often called

upon to remember the love of their dying Saviour, and the occasion of his death, which was to make *their* peace with God, they might love him with all their soul, and remember to observe the commands he has given them, in order to fit them for Heaven. I am assured, that this is the only way to render our persons and our prayers acceptable to God; of obtaining the pardon of our sins, the grace of God, and everlasting life after death.

' I understand what duties are required to make me a worthy guest at that holy Table. I must resolve to forsake those sins which cost Jesus Christ his life: And I must forgive, and love, and do good to others, since he has been so good and so kind to me, as to lay down his life for me. I dare not, therefore, I will not, turn my back upon an ordinance upon which my salvation depends. If I am not fit to go to this Sacrament, I am sure that I am not in the way of life; I must be under God's displeasure. I have nothing, therefore, to do, but what through God's grace I will endeavour to do: And this is, to prepare myself as well as I am able; and for the rest, to trust in the mercy and goodness of my Saviour, to supply, by his grace, what is wanting on my part. And I shall easily know whether I have been a worthy communicant or not, *by the life I lead afterwards*.'

If at any time the Minister of God is pressing upon you *the necessity of AN HOLY LIFE*, of walking worthy of your Christian name and calling, do not forget it as soon as you go out of the Church, but think thus with yourself:—

' My punishment will surely be very great, if I, who call myself a Christian, do lead a careless and an unchristian life. I see how blind those people are, who hope to go to Heaven without endeavouring to please God and to keep his commandments. I hope I shall never forget a truth I have heard this day,—That Religion, and the way to please God, does not consist so much in observing the outward duties of Christianity, as in leading an holy life. I see plainly, that a man may go to the Church, and to the Sacrament, without being *just, or humble, or devout, or temperate, or charitable*. And that the reason why we go to Church, and pray to God, and hear his Word, is this; that we may obtain *his* grace to enable us to lead a *sober, a righteous, and a godly* life. This therefore, through the grace of God, shall be my great endeavour for the time to come,—to walk worthy of the religion I profess, and of the hopes I have of being happy when I die.'

' I have



'I have this day,' saith another, 'been put in mind of a truth which is too little considered by Christians; and this is, *that this life is a state of trial*; and that we shall be *happy or miserable* when we die, just as we have behaved ourselves *well or ill* in this world. I see then that I *may* be happy, if it is not my own fault: And I see too, that I shall certainly be miserable, if I am not careful to lead such a life as may recommend me to the mercy and favour of God. In short, I see plainly, that *now* is the time in which I am to chuse what I am to be for ever and ever. I will therefore beg of God, to keep this thought ever in my heart, and to enable me to make such a choice as that I may be happy for ever.'

And you will be better disposed to make such a choice, if you have at any time attended to a Sermon of *the great Advantage of being RELIGIOUS*. For then you will be convinced, that a firm resolution to be governed, at all times, by the laws of God, is the only sure way to have peace of mind here, and happiness hereafter; for as much as all the commands of God are good, and intended to keep us from ruining ourselves, which we should certainly do if we were left to our own choices: And that the ordinances of the Gospel are necessary to restore us to the favour of God, and serve—either to cure us of some sad disorder we labour under; or to communicate the divine graces; or to seal to us God's gracious pardon; to direct us in the way we should go; or to keep us from backsliding.

And if to this you add what you can remember to have heard concerning THE REWARD OF SIN, and GOD'S JUDGMENT UPON SINNERS, you will have motives sufficient to determine you what to do; that is, you will conclude, 'I have but one great business in this world, and that is, TO SAVE MY SOUL. This is *that one thing needful* which our Saviour speaks of. If I do not mind this, it is no matter what else I mind; *for he that loses his soul, loses more than the whole world*. This, by the grace of God, I will charge my *memory* and my *heart* with, as long as I live.'

Now, as ever you hope to do so, you must attend to another duty, which you will very often hear pressed upon Christians both in the Holy Scripture and in Sermons; and this is, *the Duty of being ALWAYS WATCHFUL*, and *upon your guard*; "because our adversary the Devil, like a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour," finding them careless, or from under God's protection.

Upon hearing this, you will do well to make such reflections as these:

'I see that we are beset on all sides with dangers and temptations to sin. We are in danger, from the corruption of our nature, which is *prone to evil continually*; we are in danger of setting our hearts upon this world, and of forgetting that this is not the world we were made for.'

'Besides these, Satan has his agents in every place, tempting us to sin of one kind or other. Some to whoredom; some to drunkenness; some to swearing, cursing, lying, or slandering; others to fraud, injustice, or oppression: Any one of which will shut me out of heaven, and send me to hell, if I am not careful to avoid them.'

'What have I then to do? Why, as I hope for heaven and happiness, I must be serious, and watch against all temptations to evil, and pray to God daily to keep me from sin and wickedness of every kind. And this, by the grace of God, shall be the great business of my life.'

Whoever knows any thing of the Christian Religion, must know, that SELF-DENIAL is a means of grace, without which no man must hope to be saved. *If any man will come after me, saith our Lord and Saviour, let him deny himself. If thy right-hand offend thee, cut it off; that is, part with any thing, though as dear to you as a right hand or a right eye, rather than offend God.*

It was not the Preacher only that said this, but they are the words of Jesus Christ himself; who said besides, that "it is better to go into life with one hand or one eye, than with two hands or two eyes to be cast into hell, where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched."

It is hardly possible for any serious Christian to hear this duty explained, and not to think of it even after he leaves the Church, and to think thus with himself:—

'I see plainly, that I must resolve to *deny myself*, to stand against all my corrupt inclinations, or be content to perish eternally. Whatever evil ways or customs I have hitherto been fond of, I must renounce and forsake them, or I see what I must follow. If an *idle* or a *careless life* has been my great sin, though the world sees no great harm in such a life, yet I see I must reform, let it cost me never so much pain and trouble, or I shall infallibly, one day or other, hear that dreadful sentence:—*Bind the unprofitable servant hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness.*'



‘If riches and the love of the world have hitherto possessed my heart, renounce them. I must, let it be never so uneasy to me, or my interest in Heaven—for God and Mammon I cannot serve. If any sinful lust or pleasure have got the power over me, and though it is become a second nature, yet I see plainly it must be renounced and forsaken, or I must never hope for Heaven. If profane talk, if swearing, lying, or flanderings, be the sins that are become habitual to me, and that I cannot without great pains leave them off; yet this pains I must take, or suffer the pains of eternal death. If tipling, if squandering away my time or estate, if gluttony or drunkenness, have been the sins I have lived in, these must be repented of and utterly forsaken, let it be never so uneasy to flesh and blood, or I shall have no part in the kingdom of heaven.

‘In short, I have been plainly told, and I plainly see, that men need not take pains to be ruined, since our own corrupt nature, if not denied, restrained, and kept under, will ruin us without remedy. I see too, that all the commands of God, all the duties which he has prescribed us, are all intended in mercy to keep us from ruining ourselves. And that if we had been suffered to follow our own wills, or the evil customs we contract, or the bad examples we meet with, we could not escape bringing upon ourselves destruction. I am left, therefore, without excuse, and I shall dearly pay for it, if I do not deny myself every thing which God had forbidden me; and if I do not look upon his commands as the only way to life and happiness everlasting.’

Thus every serious Christian will argue with himself whenever he hears any other duty of Christianity explained or recommended to his practice.

If time would permit, I would shew you how this might be done, to your great advantage, in many other instances of duty and religion.

All that I shall now add is, to put you in mind of what a blessing it is, that you have Churches to go to, and that you can hear the Word of God, and know his Will, and what you must do to be saved.

You see the great blessing of a STANDING MINISTRY, and how happy it is that there are persons appointed by the Holy Ghost, who, *at the peril of their own souls*, are to read, and faithfully to explain, the truths of the Gospel to you.

You may indeed shut your ears, or carelessly think of other matters. You may refuse to hear with attention your duty, and the dangers you are liable to. You may return home without laying these things to heart; but then be assured of it, you return home without God's blessing. You may refuse to come to Church, (as the manner of some is) and think yourselves too good to be taught, reprov'd, or put in mind of your duty; but what will this end in? Why, you will in time forget God, his commands, and all that is good. You will come at last to say, with those wicked people whom Job speaks of,<sup>4</sup> who said unto God, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.”

I need not tell you, that such people are in the way of damnation.

I pray God keep all you from following their steps. And give us his grace, that we may bear, understand, remember, consider, love, and practise, what is read and preached to us according to God's holy word and will, through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with the Father, &c.

<sup>4</sup> Job xxi. 14.



## S E R M O N II.

## THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS.

LUKE viii. 18.

*Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have.\**

WHEN our Lord bids us TAKE HEED, we may be very sure it is concerning something of great moment, and therefore to be seriously attended to. And we find it is so here. TAKE HEED, saith he, HOW YE HEAR: Your salvation depends upon your understanding and believing what you hear: *For whosoever hath*; that is, whosoever hath benefited by what he has already heard, God will increase his knowledge and his graces; *but whosoever hath not*,—have not minded what they have heard, or have not profited by it, such careless people, by a just judgment of God, shall lose that knowledge and those graces which he had given them.

TAKE HEED, therefore, that you hear the Word of God with a *serious mind*—with a purpose and desire to learn your duty, and with a resolution to practise what you hear.

Lastly, TAKE HEED WHOM YOU HEAR:—Remember whose *Ministers* you hear, whose *word*, whose *commands*, whose *threatenings*, whose *promises*, you hear. They are the Ministers of God *that watch for your souls*. They read and preach to you the *Word of God*, delivered by his own Son. They explain to you the *Commands of God*, which are designed to make you happy for ever. And they put you in remembrance of the *Promises of God*, if you are obedient; and of his *severe Threatenings*, if you despise his goodness. Remember, therefore, what the Son of God said to those that heard this Word, and would not mind it: “It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the Day of Judgment, than for such careless people.”

But having, in a former discourse upon these words, explained these things very particularly, I now proceed to shew you *the true way of profiting by Sermons*, many instances of which I gave you in my former discourse.

Let us suppose, then, that the Minister of God has at any time been explaining to you *the nature of a true Christian Faith*; the necessity of believing whatever God has made known to men; as also the danger of not living as becomes people who profess to believe such things.

If you have seriously attended to such a discourse, you will think thus with yourself:—“I am now convinced, *that without Faith it is impossible to please God*. I see plainly, that it is not a matter of indifference, whether we believe or not, since Jesus Christ himself has declared, *that he that believeth not shall be damned*; and that it is as absolutely necessary to salvation that we believe—not what we please, but—according to the faith once delivered to the Saints.

“Our Lord himself has told us, *That if we believe not in him, we shall die in our sins*. And again; *He that sinneth against the Holy Ghost shall never be forgiven*. So dreadful a thing it is not to know, or wilfully to mistake, the truth!

“Whatever, therefore, God has revealed, must be true and certain, though I cannot comprehend it. It is not necessary that we should always know the reasons of God’s will and pleasure; it is enough that we know it to be his will. It is sufficient to me to know and believe, that God would have all men to be saved. That Jesus Christ his Son has shewed unto us the way of salvation. That he has reconciled us to God. That he will be our advocate with God for our pardon, if we truly repent us of our sins. That God will afford us all manner of assistance by his Spirit, to overcome all the corruptions of our nature, and all the difficulties we shall meet with. That he will make us happy for ever, if we strive to please him during

\* See Matth. xiii. 9. Luke x. 24. xi. 28. John xv. 12. Heb. xii. 14.

† John viii. 24.

\* this



‘ this short life : And that we shall be most miserable when we die, if we die in our sins unrepented of.

‘ In order to prevent this sad doom, he has made known to us what are the things which we must do to be saved, and what we must avoid as, ever we hope to escape the bitter pains of eternal death. He has also made known to us, that all things are naked and open unto his eyes, that we may live as having him the constant witness of our words and actions. I must not, therefore, deceive myself, nor fancy, that if I should be so unhappy as not to believe, or not to mind these things, that therefore I have no reason to fear what will follow : For God’s Word will come to pass, though all the world should not mind it.

‘ I see, therefore, how necessary it is to have the articles of my Christian Faith in my memory, and before my eyes continually; and to beg of God daily to increase my faith. I will read or hear God’s word with reverence, and endeavour to lay up in my heart what I hear and understand.— And, knowing that faith is the gift of God, I will not fail to ask it of God with all the earnestness of my soul; for I have been told, and do believe, that the most learned man on earth cannot convince or convert me, unless I attend to the Word spoken, and ponder it in my heart, and beg of God to enlighten my mind.

‘ I will not be afraid to ask myself this short question, *Do I live by faith?* that is, Does the fear of God hinder me from doing what I know will displease him? Do the promises of God affect my heart, and make me desirous to be made worthy to obtain them? Do the judgments of God upon wicked people, which are recorded in the Holy Scriptures, make me take warning, and fear to draw down the like judgments upon myself? Have I a just value for the Christian Religion, and its ordinances and Ministers, and for whatever has any relation to God? Have I a love for the Gospel, and for the truths contained in it; and do I resolve to govern myself according to them? Do I consider what a dreadful thing it is for a Christian so to live as if not one word of the Gospel were true? Do I hate sin as most displeasing to God, and hurtful to my own salvation? Do I distrust myself and my own strength, and put my whole trust and confidence in God? Do I constantly pray for his grace to increase my faith, and that I may be able to live as becomes my profession?— If I do this in the sincerity of my heart, then I may be assured that I live by faith; and that I have a principle of a new life, which, if I do not stifle it, will in the

‘ end bring me to everlasting life and happiness.’

These, I say, will (through the blessing of God) be the fruits; these, or such like, will be the observations and resolutions which a serious Christian will make, who has carefully minded what has at any time been said upon the subject of faith.

Let us, in the next place, suppose, that you have heard a sermon concerning THE LOVE OF GOD. The Love of God being *the first and great command*; it would be unpardonable for a Christian to hear a sermon upon that subject without minding it, and without being bettered by it.

I will endeavour to shew you how you may be truly edified by such a discourse, if you have seriously attended to it. You will, in the first place, have been put in mind, that God is worthy of your greatest love, and that he may justly require it of you, that you love him above all things; because he made you, and it is he who by his providence preserves you every day of your life, and who is the giver of all the blessings you either enjoy or hope for. Besides this, he intends, out of his infinite goodness, to make you happy for ever, if it is not your own fault. And though you know in your conscience, that you have grievously offended God, yet he is ready to pardon you upon your sincere repentance. And to convince you of this, after the most kind and gracious manner, he sent his beloved Son from Heaven to assure us thereof, and of his GOOD-WILL TO MEN: By Him proposing terms of pardon and mercy upon most reasonable conditions, and eternal happiness upon performing them.

His Son also procured for us this great favour, that we might apply to God, *as to a father*, in all our necessities; for whatever we want in all our troubles: And this with confidence that he would hear us with the tenderness of a father.

Besides this, you will have been instructed what it is TO LOVE GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. That it is, to desire and to strive to please God in all your actions. To have a great regard to his laws; to what he has commanded, and to what he has forbidden. To love his *Word*, in which his will is made known to us; and his *Ministers*, who are by him appointed to instruct you, and to watch for your souls as they that must give an account. It is to speak of God after the most respectful manner, that others may learn by your example to love and reverence him. It is to be pleased and rejoice when God is honoured; when things go as God would have them; when justice, piety, and charity, do thrive and are encouraged; and

to



to be grieved when God's laws are transgressed, neglected, or despised. Lastly, it is to submit to God's will, and what he orders for you; and to suffer any thing rather than knowingly and wilfully to offend God; and to deny yourself every thing which you have reason to believe will displease him.

Having heard all this with seriousness and attention, you cannot but come to some such resolutions as these following:

‘ I see plainly, that I can have no security, no real satisfaction in life, until I can bring my heart to love God sincerely. In order to this, I will often call to mind the many blessings which I have received from God, that I may give him thanks for them, the surest way to increase my love for him who has been so good and kind to me. I will read or hear his *Holy Word* with care, that I may know his *will*, his *promises*, and the great reward he has proposed to his faithful servants. I will abhor and avoid all such persons, principles, company, and conversation, as may lessen my esteem for and love of God. I will not let the love of the world possess my heart, lest I forget God, and forget that he is my only good. And because love amongst friends is soon lost for want of conversing with one another, I will go to God daily, and lay my wants and my desires before him: particularly, I will beg of God to pour into my heart such love towards him, that I may love him above all things, and that his love may be the commanding principle of my life.’

These, I say, or some such, will be the thoughts and resolutions of every sober Christian, who has attended to a sermon concerning *the Love of God*. And he will be more careful to put these resolutions in practice, when he considers—that such as do not love God, do really hate God, (as monstrous a sin as that is;) that is, they wish that there were no such a being to call them to an account for their wicked deeds. And they are pleased with such men, and such arguments, as tend to lessen their belief of a future state, and a future account. So dreadful is the sin of hating (that is, of not loving) God!

We will suppose again, that you had been instructed in the meaning and importance of *the second great command*, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF. It is probable you will have been put in mind of the great stress that is laid upon this command by Christ himself: “This commandment have we from Him; that he who loveth God, love his brother also.” From

which you will conclude, that nothing can more effectually recommend you to the favour of God, than a *Love for your Neighbour*, since God has placed this duty the very next to the love we owe to himself. You will be careful therefore to remember, what you have learned from Christ himself as well as from his Ministers, *whom* you are to account your neighbour, and how you are to shew your love to him.

You will remember, That every man is your neighbour and your brother, who may be benefited by your love. That God is our common father, and that all we are brethren. That we are all members of the same body, of which Jesus Christ is the head. That God has so ordered matters, that the members of this body should depend one upon another. That the poor shall depend upon the rich for their subsistence; and the rich, whatever they think of it, shall receive a greater advantage from the prayers of the poor. You will then call to mind how you are to express your love to your neighbour. The command says, YOU ARE TO LOVE HIM AS YOURSELF. You know, without a teacher, how you love yourself. That you wish and take satisfaction in your own welfare and prosperity: That you are sorry when any evil or mischief befalls yourself. You do not love to have your own faults aggravated, or your good name abused; and how ready you are to find excuses for your own mistakes. In short, you know very well how you would have others to shew their love for you. And that it is no small comfort for the ignorant and unlearned, that their duty is contained in so few words, and that they can easily understand it, by considering how they love, how they would be dealt with themselves.

These things considered, you will, if you have any grace in your heart, come to some such resolutions as these following:

‘ I see that I am bound as a Christian, and at the peril of my soul, to be just to, to forgive, and give to, and love, and pray for, my neighbour, as becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ. I will therefore do no wrong to any man, though I could hope to be never so great a gainer by it. I will not oppress, over-reach, vex, or harass others, though it should be in my power. I will not envy my neighbour's prosperity, nor bear malice in my heart, though I could never so well conceal it. I will despise no man living for the meanness of his condition, or for the misfortunes that may have befallen him; knowing very well, that we are all subject to misfortunes, to failings, to every thing that may make a man contemptible. I will be ready to do good with



‘with what God has blessed me, and even  
 ‘glad to communicate, knowing that with  
 ‘such sacrifices God is pleased. I will not  
 ‘render evil for evil, though revenge is  
 ‘sweet to flesh and blood. If any man is  
 ‘my enemy without cause, I will pray that  
 ‘God would convert him; that he will re-  
 ‘strain and keep him from evil and mischief,  
 ‘which otherwise will be the greatest in-  
 ‘jury to himself. I will not say, that my  
 ‘neighbour does not deserve my love; for  
 ‘if God should deal with me according to  
 ‘my deserts, I should be the most miserable  
 ‘creature alive. I will not dare to say, such  
 ‘a man has injured me, and I will not for-  
 ‘give him; because God himself has de-  
 ‘clared, that just so he will deal with me.  
 ‘I will bear with the infirmities of others,  
 ‘hoping that others, and especially God  
 ‘himself, will bear with mine. I will thus  
 ‘endeavour to express my love to my neigh-  
 ‘bour out of love to God, who has com-  
 ‘manded me so to do; and because I be-  
 ‘lieve it will be most acceptable to the Di-  
 ‘vine Majesty. And I will beg of God to  
 ‘give me the spirit of love; and that the  
 ‘love of God, and of my neighbour, may  
 ‘be the commanding principle of my life.  
 ‘And, that every night of my life I may  
 ‘lie down to sleep with the same chari-  
 ‘table dispositions with which I desire and  
 ‘hope to die.’

This will be the *true way* OF PROFITING  
 BY SERMONS, and you will return home  
 from God’s house with a blessing.

We will suppose, in the next place, that  
 you had been instructed by God’s Minister,  
 concerning *the necessity, the indispensable ne-  
 cessity, of AN HOLY LIFE*. You would not  
 sure go home, and think no more upon  
 a subject which it so much concerns you to  
 remember. For you will have been assured  
 by the Spirit of God, as well as by the Mi-  
 nister of God, THAT WITHOUT HOLINESS  
 NO MAN MUST SEE THE LORD. That the  
 design of all the laws and ordinances of God  
 is, *to make you partaker of a divine nature*;  
 that is, to make you holy, that you may be  
 capable of being happy. And that we are  
 heirs of salvation on no other terms but  
*these*: That we study to please God in the  
 whole course of our lives; and that we must  
 not satisfy ourselves with the outward duties  
 of religion, which are of no value in the  
 sight of God, if they do not help to free us  
 from the slavery of sin, and restore us to the  
 image of God.

And to oblige you not to be indifferent in  
 a matter of so great concern, you will re-  
 member, that you have been often told, how  
 very different the portion of good and bad  
 men is *sure* to be in the next world. And

that if you make God your enemy by an un-  
 holy life, you are for ever undone.

You will then begin to think it worth  
 your while to call to mind, in what, as you  
 have been often told, this holiness consists.  
 That it is not confined to the time you are  
 at church, or at your prayers, but that it  
 must be the work of your whole life. That  
 you must be holy in your *conversation*, that  
 is, inoffensive and exemplary. Holy in  
 your *dealings*, that is, just and conscientious.  
 Holy with regard to God, reverencing every  
 thing that belongs to him, hearing his word,  
 resolving to be governed by his commands;  
 praying to him for what you want, and  
 praising him for his mercies. That you  
 must be holy with respect to your *neighbour*;  
 that is, you must do him no mischief; you  
 must relieve him in his necessities; you must  
 pray for him; and forgive him, if he has  
 injured you. Lastly, That you must be  
 holy in what relates to *yourself*; holy in your  
*devotions*, that is, sincere and without hy-  
 pocrify; holy in repenting when you have  
 done amiss, and returning to your duty  
 without delay; holy in moderating your  
 affections for this world, that you may LOVE  
 THE LORD WITH ALL YOUR HEART. You  
 must be holy in *prosperity*, that is, not high-  
 minded; holy in *adversity*, that is, patient  
 and resigned to the will of God. You must  
 be holy in your *apparel*, modest and free  
 from pride and vanity; holy in your *diet*,  
 not given to intemperance, to gluttony, or  
 drunkenness; holy in your *diversions*, not  
 making them the great business of your life.

If you are a *Parent*, you must express your  
 holiness in bringing up your children in the  
 fear of God; if a *Master*, you must be holy,  
 that is, just to your servants, remembering  
 that you yourself *have a master in heaven*.

In short, you will have been told, that  
 nothing ought to discourage you from being  
 as holy as possibly you *can* be; because God,  
 who requires you to be holy, has obliged  
 himself to assist you with sufficient grace and  
 power; and because the more holy you are,  
 the more happy you are sure to be when  
 you die.

Now, if you have pondered these things  
 in your heart, you cannot but come to some  
 such resolutions as these following:

‘I am now convinced, that the manner  
 ‘of my life is the only proof of my being  
 ‘in the favour or under the displeasure of  
 ‘God. That to lead a careless, thoughtless,  
 ‘or a useless life, will certainly bring upon  
 ‘me the sentence of the fruitless tree: *Cut  
 ‘it down, why cumbereth it the ground?*  
 ‘I will therefore endeavour to please God,  
 ‘by being as careful of my ways, and as  
 ‘obedient



obedient to his commands, as his grace shall enable me to be. And since he is so good as to allow me to call him *my father*, I will endeavour to lead such a life as becomes the child of so holy a father. To this end, I will endeavour to understand what the will of God is, and will compare my life with those rules he has given me to walk by, that I may be satisfied whether I am, in truth, in the way of holiness or not.

I will not delude myself with saying, that every man has his faults, and that God is merciful: For I understand he is just as well as merciful; that he hates sin in every body; and that if my faults are such as he hates, and has forbidden, and I continue in them, I shall provoke him to deny me the benefit of his mercy, and shall feel the severity of his justice. I will not therefore, as I love my own soul, live in any known sin, but will keep a strict watch over my heart and actions, and deny myself, and part with, any pleasure rather than displease God. Nor will I flatter myself with vain hopes, that I may get habits of holiness hereafter, and before I die; for if I think it too soon to please God now, he may be provoked to deny me his grace, and then I shall never be holy, never happy.

And because good purposes, without a change of life, will signify nothing but to condemn me, I will therefore beg of God to touch my heart most powerfully from above, that I may not only resolve, but do, what he would have me.

Such resolutions as these, every Christian should make when he hears the Word of God read or preached. And indeed, it is plainly for want of minding the things they hear, and for want of pondering them in their hearts, that Christians are so careless, so ignorant, and so wicked. And those very

people, who would not for the world deny their religion, or give up their hopes of Heaven, are yet in danger of never going to Heaven, because they would not hear with attention their duty nor their danger, nor ponder them in their hearts.

People do not consider, that want of learning will be no excuse, in a Christian country, for their being ignorant of their duty. Such as will attend the church, and pray for God's grace, and hear his Word with a serious and devout temper, and practise what they know, are in as sure a way of happiness as the most learned. Take heed, therefore, how ye hear: And if you would indeed profit by hearing, and carry a blessing home with you, imprint upon your hearts some such truths as these:

'This is God's Minister; what he delivers is God's Word. I mind attentively my betters when they speak to me, and I lay it up in my heart: And shall I forget what my Maker has said as soon as I am got from his presence? God forbid. I will rather go home, and consider with myself what use I ought to make of what I have heard, and will order my life accordingly.'

Do so;—and God will increase your knowledge and your graces. And the word which you hear will become indeed the word of salvation (as St. Paul calls it) to every one that believeth, and so receives it.

And may our blessed Lord, who has caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, grant that we may in such wise hear, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of his holy Word, we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which he has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

To whom, &c.



## S E R M O N III.

## THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS.

VOUCHSAFE, O Lord, to direct me, and bless this Discourse for the good of my Flock: that they may glorify Thee for the Truths they shall hear, and for the Blessing they shall receive, by the Ministry of the most unworthy of thy servants, O Sovereign Pastor! Amen.

LUKE viii. 18.

*Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have.*<sup>1</sup>

I HAVE already, in a former discourse, explained to you what our Lord means by this earnest caution; namely, To assure us, that according to the measure of our love for God's Word, our attention in hearing it, and our care to profit by it, shall be the measure of grace which God will give us.

I have already shewed you the danger of living under the light of the Gospel, and not being bettered by it: Our Saviour says expressly, "That it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such people:" Because the word which you hear is "not the word of men, but in truth the word of God."

*This is my beloved Son, saith God, hear ye him.* And it is *his* Gospel we preach, we explain, we press upon you. It is HIM you despise, when you mind not what is said to you by *his* Ministers.

And, on the other hand, when you come to church with a serious, teachable temper, and hear his word with reverence and submission, you do most certainly engage him to enlighten your minds with saving truth.

It was for this reason I proposed to shew you THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS; by shewing you how every Christian *ought* and *may* most profitably apply the things he hears to himself, and form such resolutions as are most likely to influence his practice. I have already done this on several practical subjects, such as most nearly concern a christian life; and shall now proceed to others of like importance.

Let us then suppose, that you have heard a discourse concerning THE DANGER OF KEEPING BAD COMPANY; *of conversing with people of wicked principles or wicked lives.*

To be sure you will have been put in mind, how many have been ruined by an unwise choice of such companions; how many have got habits of idleness, of intemperance, of trifling away their time and their estates; have been strangely corrupted both in their principles and in their manners.

You will, with great truth, have been assured, that in all companies where men make a mock of sin, speak lightly of God, and profanely of any thing that belongs to him; *there* Satan infallibly governs, inspires his agents, and more or less infects all that are present. That you will in time be content to hear the most serious things made a jest of, and to wish inwardly that the things you were taught to believe were not true, and that there was no God to call you to an account.

You do not know but the company you are fond of are Atheists, men under the government of Satan; if you live as they do, you will in time believe as they do, whatever at present you may think of it.

You will have been assured, that nothing more provokes God to deprive men of his Holy Spirit, and of his graces, than the frequenting of wicked company, where things hateful to God are said and done.

Lastly, you will have heard from the inspired Writer, that *wine, and new wine, take away the heart*; that is, the understanding: And every one, who is given to drinking and company, will find it so to his sorrow when it may be too late to return to a sober mind; sad experience convincing us, that one need but taste a sinful pleasure, or frequent bad company a very little while, to be very fond of them, and a slave to them.

<sup>1</sup> See Amos viii. 11. Matth. xviii. 14. Heb. ii. 1, 2, &c. 1 Theff. ii. 13. iv. 1. James i. 21.



If I should observe any young person very serious and attentive when he hears these truths, I should conclude that such a person will make some such reflections as these following:—

‘ I thank God that I have had this fair warning given me. I am convinced that bad company has cost many a man very dear. I have within me the same seeds of wickedness with other people; and if God leaves me to my own choices, and I make choice of bad company, I shall be as wicked as the worst of them; my heart will be infected, my faith weakened, my good purposes cooled, and all my graces injured. I am convinced of the difficulty of getting out of the snare, and of breaking off evil habits; and that if I provoke God to withdraw his Spirit, I never can repent, never can return to a sober mind. I will therefore keep in my mind the words of the Apostle, *Evil communications corrupt good manners*; and I am resolved, by the grace of God, to avoid, as I would do the Devil, the company of all such by whose loose principles and lewd examples my faith may be corrupted, or my morals endangered.’

I persuade myself, that all young persons, who have any grace left, will make some such resolutions as these, and will beg of God the grace to keep them.

How many discourses have Christians heard concerning another reigning vice, THE SINS OF IMPURITY, FORNICATION, AND UNCLEANNESS, without being bettered by what either God or his Ministers have said upon those subjects. They have heard, for instance, God’s express declaration, “That whoremongers and adulterers God will judge; that they shall have their part in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.” That God abhors such as fall into these sins, and do not immediately repent and forsake them.

They have as often been put in mind of the difficulty of forsaking these sins; because these sins do blind the understanding, waste and harden the conscience, blot out all good purposes, grieve the Spirit of God, drive him from them, and give the Devil the greatest power over those that live in them. They see with their own eyes, the pains people take to conceal these vices; which should convince Christians how shameful they really are. And they have often heard what St. Paul has said of these sins: “That they are such as should not so much as be named among Christians.”

Lastly, Christians know that God has appointed LAWFUL MARRIAGE as a means to prevent these sins, so hateful to God, and so destructive to men. And yet this un-

clean spirit reigns in the world without controul; very many fall into these sins, many live in them, and too many make a jest of them.

What can be the reason of this? Why: Christians, when they hear these things, do not mind them; they do not think of them after they leave the church; they do not ponder them in their hearts.

Young people, when they hear these things, should ask themselves some such questions as these:—

‘ Do I really believe, that, by falling into these sins, I shall lose the favour of God, and must expect a most fearful judgment if I continue in them? I dare not say I do not believe this: And if I do believe these truths, my crime will admit of no excuse; I shall be self-condemned, and lost irrecoverably, and ruined for ever, if I go on and continue in such sins as these. I will not flatter myself that God will be merciful to me, though I continue in sin; he was the same merciful God who, for these sins, destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from Heaven. I am to judge by this of God’s mercy when it is abused. I will not venture upon these sins in hopes of repenting before I die; for at the best I can but repent for myself; I cannot repent for those I shall corrupt, whose blood shall be required at my hands. I will not make myself easy, because I may hope to hide my crimes; for I am assured, that God will bring to light the hidden works of darkness, when the stoutest, hardest heart shall be ashamed and made to tremble. I will therefore endeavour to imprint these terrors upon my heart, and preserve my innocence, as I love my own soul. I will avoid, as much as I can, all temptations to these sins; idleness, intemperance; all company that make a jest of these crimes; all people that have lost their modesty; all whom the Devil has inspired with immodest stories, filthy discourse, lewd songs; in short, all that discover, by their idle talk and wanton behaviour, that they only want to be tempted, that they only want an occasion, to be lewd.’

If the Devil, as be sure he will, lays a temptation in my way, a young man, who has any grace left, will say, in the words of Joseph, on the like occasion, “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?”

A woman, who has not quite lost her modesty, will, on the like occasion, argue with herself in the words of Tamar, David’s daughter: “I, whither shall I make my shame to go,” if I consent to this foul crime?



And knowing that I have not the power of resisting temptations in my own hands, I will pray to God every day of my life, to give me grace and strength to resist all temptations, which will cost me so very dear.

And such as have been so unhappy as to have fallen into these sins will repent forthwith, and be very watchful for the time to come, if they will but think seriously of the words of Christ; "That the unclean spirit will return with seven others more wicked than himself:" And then what destruction will they make!

These are the reflections that Christians should make, and will make, if they have any grace, when they hear a discourse of the dreadful consequence of sins of impurity.

There is another very great and very common sin, very little minded; however, I would beg you would lay to heart both the guilt and the curse that attends it. It is *the sin of profaning THE NAME OF GOD to idle or wicked purposes.*

This is done every day, without fear and without thought; though it is a sin most displeasing to God, for which he will not hold men guiltless; that is, he will punish them in an extraordinary manner: Because the impious custom of *swearing in common conversation* strikes directly at the honour of God; it makes his name, that is, God himself, contemptible; it lessens men's esteem and reverence for him that made them; and treats him as an idol, which can do them neither good nor hurt. By this impious custom, men come to lose the fear of an oath; so that oaths and vows are no manner of rule by which we can judge whether they speak true or false. From common swearing they come to cursing themselves and others; from cursing to blasphemy, and from blasphemy to downright atheism; to say, at least to wish, that there was no God.

You will therefore, when you hear these things, as ever you hope to escape the vengeance of God; you will lay these truths to heart, and resolve with yourself as follows:

' I will always endeavour to speak of God with an awe and reverence upon my mind.  
' If I am called to take a *solemn oath*, I will consider the meaning and terror of those words with which it is bound upon me, so  
' *HELP YOU GOD!* and then I shall conclude, that as ever I expect the help of God when I shall most want it, I am bound to speak the very truth. As for *rash, customary oaths*, I will abhor the appealing to God, as every man does who swears, with a lie or a trifle in my mouth. If ever I shall be so unhappy as to be surprized into such a sin, I will immediately beg God's pardon, and

resolve to do so no more. And lest such oaths should become less dreadful to me, and more familiar, I will avoid, as I would do the Devil, or leave the company of, a man who is given to such vices, lest I should provoke God to leave me to myself, and lest I should become as bad as the worst.

' That I may not take the name of God in vain, when I am at my prayers, and worshipping him, I will endeavour that my words and heart shall go together. To this end I will consider, that all the prayers of the church begin with such expressions as are most proper to make us mind to whom we speak; that it is—to an Almighty God, and merciful Father, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known; who is the fountain of all wisdom and goodness, the creator and preserver of mankind; whose nature and property is always to have mercy and to forgive.

These, and such expressions, if attended to, will call back a roving mind, and fix it upon the duty you are about; will awaken the most careless, and melt down the most stubborn heart.

Whoever comes to these resolutions, which all people will do who are afraid to take God's name in vain, will not often speak of God, or to God, without thought, without reason, and without reverence.

The next great sin to this is that of PROFANING THE LORD'S DAY. You hear the command of God touching this sin, and your duty, every such day. And you hear your duty often pressed upon you in sermons; and too often you return home without profiting by the one or the other.

Do but consider the reason of this:—Why: you do not seriously attend to what you hear; or you forget it as soon as you leave the church; or you do not apply the truths you hear to yourself, or come to any sober resolutions concerning them. For is it possible that you should hear and believe that God has expressly commanded one day in seven to be kept holy? That *he hath blessed that day*; that is, he has joined an especial blessing to the due observation of it. That it is a day dedicated to the honour and worship of God, and of Jesus Christ our Saviour. That if men were not on these days put in mind of the duty they owe to God; and if certain persons were not by his command appointed to keep up the knowledge of God, and of our dependance upon him, we should soon lose the knowledge of the true God, (as many nations have done) all sense of piety, all concern for what *must* come hereafter, whether men know, whether they think of it or not. And lastly, that such as do not KEEP THIS DAY HOLY, by going to the assemblies of the faithful, do, in effect, excommunicate themselves.

Is

*X. It is recorded of Bp Beveridge that before he pronounced the word God he always made a pause*



Is it possible, I say, that a Christian, when he is put in mind of these truths, should not come to some such firm resolutions as these:—

‘ I will consider who it is that has given me this command: that it is He who gives me all my time, and who blesteth all my labours. I will consider what it is he has commanded me: why; that I should, for one day in seven, leave all my worldly cares and concerns in his hands, whose blessing upon one day’s labour is of more value than the whole week’s work without it: And that I should dedicate this day to his honour; to give him thanks for his care over me; to acknowledge and adore his infinite perfections, his *power*, his *wisdom*, his *goodness*, his *truth*, and his *justice*. And lastly, to acknowledge my own misery, without his blessing: And that I am subject to *ignorance*, to *want*, to *troubles*, to *sickness*, to *sin*, and to *death*, even to *death eternal*.

‘ I will therefore resolve, as ever I hope for a blessing in this life, or for happiness in the next, I WILL REMEMBER THE LORD’S DAY TO KEEP IT HOLY. I will go to the house of God, and confess my own unworthiness, and his infinite goodness. I will appear before God, with my *heart* as well as with my *body*. I will confess my sins unto God, and hope for a share in the absolution pronounced by his Minister in his name. I will attend to his Word, and say a *serious Amen* to the graces and blessings there prayed for: And I will receive, with the greatest devotion, THE SOLEMN BLESSING of the Priest of God, by which he dismisseth the congregation; because I have the sure promise of God himself, that his blessing shall attend the blessing pronounced by his Priest.

‘ I will then return home, and consider seriously what I have heard, and then I will lay all my own particular wants before the throne of grace. I will consider, that it is God’s *own day*; that it is the day of giving *pardon* to sinners; of giving *grace* to the humble; of giving *comfort* to the afflicted; of giving *strength* to the weak; of giving *blessings* to all that call upon him in sincerity.

‘ And lastly, I will pray God to deliver me from all those ways by which this good day is generally profaned. Nor will I spend that time in *idleness*, in *sloth*, in *trifling*, with a careless indifference, which is consecrated to the honour of God, and designed to prepare me for an eternal rest hereafter.’

Make such resolutions as these, when you hear this duty recommended and explained;

<sup>a</sup> Numb. vi. 23, &c.

and depend upon God for his blessing upon them.

When one considers what steps people take from one sin to another, till they become very often both *hardened* and *reprobate*; one must conclude, that such people never seriously attended to what the Scriptures have told us concerning the DECEITFULNESS OF SIN. “ That if men will not retain God in their knowledge, God will give them up to a mind void of judgment; to work all iniquity with greediness.”

That this has been the case of an infinite number of people, who have fallen into crimes and courses, which once in their lives they abhorred the thoughts of: That the most profligate sinners did once hate those vices they now are so fond of; and were afraid of that God, whose threats and judgments they *now* never mind, or fear: That most people, before they were corrupted, did blush, and start, and were ashamed of doing a base, or an unworthy thing, which *now* never disturbs them: That when men have once lost the fear of God, they will do what pleaseth themselves, though all the world sees their folly, and what their end will be: And that there is no wickedness which can be named, which such people have not at last fallen into:—We have very many scripture examples which confirm this truth.

A Prince, beloved of God, but giving way to his lusts, first corrupts the wife, and then murders her husband. His son, by the same steps, falling into gross and senseless idolatry.

Another great man asking the Prophet, “ Am I a dog, to do such things as you say “ I shall one day come to do?” Which yet he afterwards did without scruple.

By these instances you should be convinced, that neither the greatest wisdom, nor the best education, nor the greatest favours of God, nor the good opinion we may have of our own sense and resolutions, can secure us, when once we give way to our own appetites to do what God has forbidden.

You see a *common swearer*. You think little of it. You esteem it a frailty only. You do not see the end of this sin; that it leads to impiety, to perjury, to atheism, and damnation.

You see a *tippler*, or a *drunkard*. The sin is so common you mind it not. You do not see the end of it; his family and his affairs are neglected; God and religion, and his soul, are the least of his thoughts or concern; he grows sottish and thoughtless, contracts distempers, and dies hard, or in despair.

You



You see another given to *lewd, filthy, or profane talk*. You laugh with him, and see no harm in it. You would tremble if you could see what this leads to. He grows debauched, becomes fearless of offending God, hardened in wickedness and infidelity, and is taken off in his sin. This does not affect you, because you are yet alive.

If people will despise the Lord's Day; neglect the ordinances; refuse to hear God's word, or to know his will; he will withdraw his graces, they will grow more careless, and at last professedly wicked, and ripe for judgment.

You have often heard what St. Paul observes, that INFIDELITY, *the not retaining God in their knowledge*, was the occasion of the vilest sins that ever were thought of. You may be assured of it, the same cause will at all times have the same dreadful effects.

In short, the beginning of sin is not regarded; but one evil habit certainly begets another, till men forget God; till God forsakes them, and leaves them to themselves; till they have filled up the measure of their sins; and till God sends upon them swift destruction.

Well then; will you hear such truths as these without profiting by them? Can you possibly leave the church without coming to some such reflections and resolutions as these following:—

‘I see plainly, that human nature is the same, and extremely corrupt in all men: That without the grace of God we can do no good thing: That if by my sins I should grieve the Spirit of God, and force him to leave me to myself, I cannot foresee what I shall do; what I shall be; what doom I shall bring upon myself. I am convinced, that if I desire to avoid the greater sins, I must resolve to resist the very beginning of sin, the very least thing that I believe will displease God; and that if I do not do so, and get once out of God's way, one sin will infallibly lead to another. I see what blindness, what wickedness, sinners have been capable of, when once they have been left to themselves: That they could neither *think*, nor *act*, nor *live*, like men that had reason. I will endeavour (will every serious Christian say) I will live in the fear of God, that I may never consent to known iniquity. This is the only security against the greatest crimes: To be afraid of those judgments which he has threatened to sinners, and of those ways which he has assured us will be our ruin. I will not, therefore, go against my conscience in the least thing whatever; being thoroughly convinced, that I cannot take up when I please. I see the danger of continuing in any known sin: if therefore

‘I shall be so unhappy as to fall into sin, I will follow the example of holy David: *I made haste*, said he, *and delayed not, to keep thy commandments*. And I will walk humbly before God, knowing that I have nothing of my own to boast of; neither my own reason, nor my own strength, nor my best resolutions, will secure me from falling into sin, without the help of God.

‘I have the comfort of knowing—that while I fear to *offend*, and sincerely desire to *please* God, I shall be under the protection of his good providence: He will give his holy Angels charge concerning me; he will inspire me with a dread of such things as would hurt me; support me under temptations; correct me when I am going wrong; awaken my conscience; lay restraints upon my passions; and keep me from such sins as are the ruin of those that forget God. In short, the wrath of God is, in the Gospel of Christ, so plainly revealed against all that live wickedly, that all such as do so will (to make their minds easy) either repent and forsake their sins, or strive to blot the knowledge of God out of their minds, and turn infidels. For fear, therefore, of falling into that most dreadful judgment, I will resolve, by the grace of God, not to live in any known sin, lest in time I become an atheist.’

These are the resolutions, or some such as these, that you should make when you hear a sermon concerning *the deceitfulness of sin, and the steps sinners take to their ruin*.

Christians must never hope to escape falling into sins of every kind, who do not seriously attend to what God has made known to us concerning *the nature of TEMPTATIONS and TRIALS, and the way not to be hurt by them*.

They are charged, as they value their souls, to watch against temptations, and to pray continually, that they may not fall into or be overcome by them. They are assured, by the Spirit of God, that the Devil is perpetually seeking whom he may devour, finding them off their guard, and from under God's protection. They are put in mind of their own frailty, that they may look up to God perpetually, and depend upon his grace. They are over and over again told, that there is no condition of life but what is subject to temptations; that every man living has reason to be upon his guard against the wiles of the Devil, since he had power to prevail with Judas to betray the Son of God himself, with the chief of God's priests to accuse him most wrongfully, and with Pilate to condemn him against his conscience. They have the example of our First Parents, to convince them how weak they are, and what *will* be the effects of giving way



way to the suggestions of the Devil. They see, every day, Christians who have vowed to renounce the devil, the world, and the lusts of the flesh, as much led by them as the very heathens.

These things, one should hope, might awaken Christians, and make them fly from the wrath to come; but, God knows, it is too often that they are never minded.

Christians hear them with indifference; they leave the church, and "Satan cometh immediately, and taketh the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." They meet with temptations at every turn, and are drawn away either by their lusts, or by evil examples, and are in the direct way of ruin.

Why now, what do people come to church for; but to be put in mind of these things, that they may lay them up in their hearts; and that they may in good earnest pray to be delivered from evil?

Let us beseech you, therefore, good Christians, when you hear such truths as these—ponder them in your hearts, and come to some resolutions about them.

Say to yourselves—'I have this day been told, (what I hope I shall not forget) that I have a watchful enemy to deal with; that I have a very corrupt heart, too ready to yield to his suggestions; and that I have bad examples, too many, to lead me astray, and to my ruin. I dare not, therefore, presume upon my own strength, upon my own wisdom, or conduct; but my whole trust shall be in God. I will most earnestly beg of him not to leave me to my own choices, but to discover to me the dangers I am liable to, and that he will enable me to resist and overcome them. I have been assured, that God's grace is sufficient, and therefore I will neither despair nor be dejected. I will never run into the tempta-

tions which, in my daily prayers, I pray God I may not be led into. I will remember the Word of God: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." Neither will I hearken unto the suggestions of the Devil, but RESIST HIM, (as I am exhorted by the Apostle) and then I am assured, that he cannot get an advantage over me. I will consider who it is that puts me upon forbidden things: That—it is the same Satan who said to our Saviour, *All these things will I give thee:* That it is the same evil spirit, or his angels, who suggests to me—that pleasure will not hurt you,—that revenge is sweet,—that gain, those riches, will make you happy.'

It is the same spirit that would make you believe, that there is no hurt in an idle, useless life; that there is no harm in spending your estate or your time; that they are your own, and you may do what you please with them. It is the same Satan, that tempts you to neglect the worship of God, and to think it a burthen; that persuades you to believe, that you have time enough to repent in, and to lead a new life; and that in the mean time you may follow the desires of your own heart. Lastly, it is the same evil spirit, who, when you purpose to lead a new life, and forget your good purposes; it is the same spirit that takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, in order to make your condition more desperate.

You will consider, therefore, what you lose by not attending to, and profiting by, God's Word; by not pondering it in your heart; and by not resolving to be governed by it: that is, you are like to lose your soul.

God deliver us all from such negligence and blindness; and give us grace to hear, and attend to, and remember, and profit by, his Holy Word; through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.



## S E R M O N IV.

## THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS.

LUKE viii. 18.

*Take heed how ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken, even that which he seemeth to have.\**

I Have already considered these words, and this warning, of our Lord; as also the great hazard Christians run, who live under the ordinances of the Gospel, and do not profit by them.

If it is a great misfortune not to know the Gospel, (as most sure it is) it is a much greater, to hear and to know the truths of the Gospel, and not to mind them. It was this great sin with which the Prophet Ezekiel charged the people of Israel: "This people have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not." And it was the same crime with which our Saviour so often charged the Jews, their posterity; and which was at last the cause of their destruction: "Hearing, ye hear, and will not understand."

And to such as had ears to hear, that is, the ears of the heart, he gave the charge set down in the text, *Take heed how ye hear*. For according to the measure of your attention, and your sincere desire to profit by what you hear, will be the measure of the grace and knowledge which God will give you.

Pursuant to this strict charge of our Lord and Saviour, I shall continue to shew you the true way of profiting by what you hear, of PROFITING BY SERMONS. And be assured of it, Christians, that your salvation in a great measure depends upon your doing so. "Blessed are they," saith our Lord, "that hear the Word of God and keep it." And he assures us, in another place, that the not profiting by the Word of God will be punished more severely than the greatest crimes.

I shall use no more words to persuade you, now, and at all times, carefully to mind what you hear from *God's Word*, and from his *Ministers*: but I shall proceed (as I have

done before) to shew you how you may profit by some of the most important subjects which you will hear very often pressed upon you.

For instance:—there are no subjects which Christians are more concerned to understand, and lay to heart, than those which are called THE FOUR LAST THINGS, namely, *Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell*. *Death* is not to be avoided—the time uncertain; the *Judgment*, which must follow, will be without appeal, and the sentence will send us either to *Heaven* or *Hell*.

Will you, good Christians, hear these subjects at any time explained, and pressed upon you, without laying them to heart? God forbid. Every man that wishes well to his own soul, will (when he hears these things) argue and resolve with himself after some such way as this:—

'I have this day been put in mind of some truths, which I have not considered so well as I should have done,—that the sentence of *Death* is already passed upon me, and that God only knows when that sentence will be put in execution. That whenever it is put in execution, the moment I die, my fate is determined for ever. That I must not say, when I die there will be an end of me; so far from that, that then will begin my happiness or misery. And lastly, that God may be provoked to shorten my days, when he sees that I am like to make no good use of them: it was so done by the unfruitful tree: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" How very serious should this make me, and all that hear and believe these things!

'For my own part,' (will every serious Christian say to himself) 'I will, by the grace of God, be no longer deaf to this call, nor flatter myself, that my time, my repentance, my salvation, will be always in my own power. I will consider, as I have been

\* Luke xi. 28. † Luke x. 14.

Ezek. xii. 2. Hosea viii. 12. Matth xiii. 14. Luke vi. 47. John xii. 48. Acts iii. 23. James i. 21, 22.



‘ exhorted to do, what I was sent into the world for:—That I am upon my trial; and that as I behave myself well or ill here, I shall be happy or miserable when I die. That if my corrupt nature be not changed for the better, before I leave this world, I must never hope to go to heaven. I will not forget what I have been put in mind of: What a dreadful thing it will be, if I should be surprized by death, while I am leading a *careless*, a *useless*, or a *sinful* life; before I have done any good in my generation; and when I have nothing to look back on, but what must render me altogether unworthy of mercy.

‘ That this may not be my sad case when I come to die, I will no longer defer making my peace with God by a speedy repentance, lest my case grow every day more desperate, as most surely it will; and that I may have time to *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*,—the only sure sign that my repentance was sincere!

‘ In the next place, that I may not be distracted with the cares of this world, when my thoughts should be upon another, I will settle my worldly concerns while I am in health, and after such a manner as no curse may cleave to any thing I shall leave behind me. In the mean time, I will endeavour to mortify all my evil and corrupt affections, and to wean my heart from the love of a world which I must leave so very soon. I will strive to live in peace with all the world, and every night lie down to sleep with the same charitable dispositions with which I desire and hope to die. I will endeavour to secure an interest in the mercy of God, at the hour of death, by acts of *justice*, *mercy*, and *charity*, while I live. I will, as I have been exhorted to do, endeavour always to be found in the way of my duty, that when my Lord comes, he may find me so doing, and that I may hear those comfortable words; *Well done, good and faithful servant!* I will endeavour, in the mean time, to be pleased with all God’s choices, that when sickness and death approach, it may be no new thing to me to submit *my will* to the will of God. I will consider *sickness*, and all *those afflictions which lead to death*, as ordered by a gracious God and Father. And that they must be the effect of his mercy, who cannot take delight in the miseries of his creatures; and who could take us out of the world without the least notice, were it for his glory and for our good.

‘ Lastly, I will (as I have been taught) consider *Death* as a righteous sentence of God passed upon all men for sin, and which he will graciously accept as a sacrifice, in

‘ union with that of Jesus Christ, for all the sins which we have truly repented of.

‘ Such a preparation for death as this, I am convinced, will free me from the fear of death, and from all other fears which are worse than death.

‘ *The sting of death is sin*; it is this which makes death frightful. If I can have any reasonable assurance, that my sins will be forgiven, my death will then be a passage only to a much better world; and, if it has not been my own fault, I may say with St. Paul, *TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.*

These are the truths which every Christian should remember; these the resolutions he should make, whenever he hears a discourse of *Death*, in order to the making his peace with God; that his death may be a blessing to him, and that he may find mercy at the great DAY OF JUDGMENT.

That is another article of a Christian man’s faith, which you will often hear recommended to you from the pulpit, and from the Word of God, as a subject of the greatest concern to you.

For the love, therefore, that you have for your own souls, do not *read* or *hear* of THE DAY OF JUDGMENT, without resolving to profit by it. Let every man *think*, and *argue*, and *resolve* thus with himself:—

‘ If the bitterness of death were over when our heads are laid in the grave, it would then be no great matter how we live, or how we die; but when God has expressly told us,<sup>m</sup> “That he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness;” and that he has given the world notice and *assurance* of this, by his raising of his Son Jesus Christ from the dead; *this* makes it a matter of concern, indeed, how we spend our lives. “He will judge the world in righteousness;” that is, “He will render to every man according to his works done in the body, whether they have been good or evil.”

‘ How often’ (ought every Christian to say with concern) ‘ how often have I heard this without thinking how to prepare for that great day, and the account I am then to make! I see what great reason the church had to put that prayer into my mouth, *In the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver me.* And I see too what reason I have never to repeat that prayer but with the greatest zeal and devotion, *that I may find mercy at that day.* But then (as I hope for mercy at that day) I must think of it, and prepare for it; and order my life according to that law by which I am then to be judged, acquitted, or con-

<sup>m</sup> Acts xvii. 31.

‘ damned.



‘determined. In order to this, I see I must  
 ‘(as I have been exhorted to do) not suffer  
 ‘myself to lose the sight of that *great day*,  
 ‘either by business, pleasures, or diversions;  
 ‘but my great concern must be, (will every  
 ‘serious Christian say to himself) my care  
 ‘must be, to govern my life and actions  
 ‘with an eye to the account I must then  
 ‘give, and the judgment that must fol-  
 ‘low. My care must *now* be to judge my-  
 ‘self, that I may not be condemned of the  
 ‘Lord. And the way I have been directed  
 ‘is this;—never to stifle or silence my con-  
 ‘science, but let it pass a righteous sentence  
 ‘upon every thing I do, or undertake; and  
 ‘to ask myself, upon every occasion, some  
 ‘such questions as these:

‘What account shall I give to my great  
 ‘Judge, for this *idle, useless* life I now lead?  
 ‘What account can I give for the estate his  
 ‘providence has put into my hands? What  
 ‘use have I made of the talents he has in-  
 ‘trusted me with;—of the *authority* he has  
 ‘given me, in order to promote his honour  
 ‘and the good of my fellow-creatures;—of  
 ‘the *riches* he has given me, that I may be  
 ‘able to relieve the necessities of such as are  
 ‘in want;—of the *knowledge* he has vouch-  
 ‘safed me, that I may be able to instruct  
 ‘the ignorant? All these I must *then* ac-  
 ‘count for, as sure as I *now* live; though I  
 ‘am accountable to nobody *now*, and though  
 ‘I think not of the account I am to give.  
 ‘Will not this forbidden pleasure, this un-  
 ‘righteous gain, which I have set my heart  
 ‘upon,—will it not one day rise up in judg-  
 ‘ment against me? How shall I be able to  
 ‘answer for this *trouble*, this *wrong*, this  
 ‘*hardship*, this unjust *vexation*, I am going  
 ‘to give my neighbour? I have it in the  
 ‘power of my hand to do what I please.  
 ‘Be it so. But what advantage will *that* be  
 ‘to me, when I shall have to do with an  
 ‘Almighty God, who has declared, “That  
 ‘mighty men shall be mightily tormented?”  
 ‘I have now *no fear* upon my spirits. *Well*;  
 ‘but remember, that a day is coming, when  
 ‘the stoutest, the stubbornest heart upon  
 ‘earth will tremble.

‘What folly, what madness, must it be  
 ‘to provoke Him, by my ungodly deeds,  
 ‘who is to be my Judge, to acquit or con-  
 ‘demn me!’

Let that man, who does *now* blaspheme  
 the name of the Great God, but think with  
 himself—how shall I stand before him in  
 judgment? I will bring you off,—I will  
 gain your cause,—saith a skilful lawyer:  
 But can you bring me off if my cause is  
 unjust, when I shall stand before the great  
 Judge of the world?

A man may say to himself—this is a *poor*,  
*ignorant, friendless* person, I have to deal with;

I can deal with him as I please. But hold  
 a little, and consider; Can you deal as you  
 please with Him who has declared himself to  
 be “the helper of the friendless; the avenger  
 “of the fatherless and the widow.”

Well, says another thoughtless man to  
 himself, nobody knows, nor *shall* know, this  
 that I am going about. Alas! you conclude  
 too hastily: Does not *he* know it, “to whose  
 “eyes all things are naked and open,” and  
 who has declared, that “he will bring every  
 “the most secret thing into judgment?”

Why (will every thoughtful Christian ar-  
 gue with himself) why should I spend my  
 whole life in that which will not profit me  
 in the day of judgment? It will not then  
 be asked, whether I was rich, or poor; but  
 how I bore my poor condition, or what use  
 I made of my riches? We are told, by our  
 Judge himself, what questions will be asked  
 at that day. And will it not be the highest  
 wisdom for every man to ask himself those  
 questions *now*, that he may know what an-  
 swers to make?

For instance: Let me ask myself, Have I  
 been merciful to poor and needy people, and  
 to such as were destitute of help and com-  
 fort? If you have not, it concerns you,  
 above all things, to consider how you will  
 be able to bear that doom which will then  
 be passed by your Judge: “Go, ye cursed,  
 “into everlasting fire: for I was an hun-  
 “gered, and ye gave me no meat; naked,  
 “and ye clothed me not.”

And if this is to be the sad sentence which  
 shall be passed upon the hard-hearted and  
 uncharitable at the great day, what must the  
*oppressor* expect? What have *they* to fear,  
 who waste their estates in riotous living, in  
 pride and vanity, while so many are in want  
 even of the necessities of life? What will they  
 have to say for themselves, who have done  
 nothing towards their salvation? Why;  
 they will be in the sad condition of that  
 man, “who had not on him a wedding  
 “garment:” They will stand speechless:  
 Their sin and their conscience will stop their  
 mouth.

Such as these *will* be, or *ought* to be, the  
 meditations of every serious Christian, when  
 he hears a discourse concerning a *future judg-*  
*ment*, or when he hears that great day men-  
 tioned in Scripture.

The consequence of *that judgment* is an-  
 other of those subjects which Christians  
 should never forget. It is not *I*, but your  
 Lord and Judge, who tells you what will  
 follow the judgment of the great day:—  
 “The hour is coming, in the which all that  
 “are in the grave shall hear his voice, and



"come forth; they that have done good,  
"unto the resurrection of life; and they that  
"have done evil, unto the resurrection of  
"damnation."

You hear, good Christians, how nearly we are all concerned in *this revelation of the different portions of good and bad men in the next world*. My purpose is, to shew you the true way of *profiting* by what you shall at any time hear upon these subjects.

For example:—When you hear the description of HELL, and the fearful punishment of impenitent sinners, that they "will be sent to a place of torment;"—that they "must suffer the vengeance of eternal fire;"—that their worm never dieth;"—that they "are to be tormented for ever and ever; and that they shall seek death, but shall not find it."—When you hear these amazing truths, do not strive to forget them; do not go about to question them, for they are the declarations of God himself; and they are revealed to us as the strongest motives to repentance and an holy life, *and that we may never come into that place of torment*. They are designed to restrain sinners from ruining themselves, and will be found true, whether they *believe*, whether they *think* of them, whether they *fear* them, or not. "Woe unto you that laugh now," says our Lord, (that is, that strive to divert the thoughts of the wrath to come) "for ye shall mourn and weep."

"I will therefore," (will every Christian of sense and sobriety say) "I will abhor and avoid, as I would do the Devil himself, the company and conversation of those reprobate men, who make a jest of *sin*, of *hell*, and of *eternal torments*. If it is uneasy to me, and I tremble, when I but think of these things, let me consider the most deplorable condition of those lost souls, who now feel those torments, and who would not be persuaded to think of, and to fear them, when it was in their power, through the grace of God, to escape them."

But then you will remember, that it is not enough to fear, unless your fears have this good effect, to make you fear to offend Him, *who can destroy both body and soul in that hell* which you tremble to think of. And remember, likewise, that we need not take pains to go to *that place of torment*; our corrupt nature will lead us thither of course, if we do not *strive*, if we do not *take pains*, to avoid it.

It is for this reason, and not to fright us without cause, that the Spirit of God has represented the portion of the damned as the greatest of all evils; that men may be prevailed on to *work out their salvation with*

*fear and trembling*; that is, with a concern answerable to the punishment they will escape by so doing.

No Christian, who hears and lays this to heart, will flatter himself, that God will not be so severe as he has threatened. "The very Angels that sinned," we are assured, "are reserved in everlasting chains of darkness unto the judgment of the great day." And so *sure*, as well as *severe*, will the punishment of sinners be, that no less a sacrifice than the life of his own son could prevail with God to accept of their repentance. So that such as do not repent have nothing to look for but judgment without mercy, as sure as *this word*, and *that God*, whose word it is, *is true*.

These truths, good Christians, you will often hear pressed upon you, by God in his word, and by his Ministers in their sermons. Will you not give yourselves leave to think of them after you leave the church? God forbid. I will tell you what you should do, that you may profit by them. We should, every soul of us, reason and resolve thus with himself:—

"I will endeavour to keep in my mind a dread of those fearful punishments, which (I am assured) are to be the portion of those who live without fear of what must come hereafter. I will consider what my religion requires of me, in order to be secure from these threatened evils. And I will also remember who those are, who (as God himself hath declared) shall be condemned to hell, if they do not repent in time."

They are such as *know not God*, and that *obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*. "These," saith the Apostle, "shall be punished with everlasting destruction." So that all UNBELIEVERS, and all Christians that live like unbelievers, *fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind; all thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, and extortioners*; all these, without a timely and sincere repentance, are to have their portion with devils.\*

A man must be wretchedly careless indeed, who can hear this declaration of God himself, and not think of getting out of the way of perdition. And even the best of men will fear for themselves, when they hear our Saviour declare, "That broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many, many there are that are in it." And all Christians, who give themselves liberty to think of these things, will, when they are tempted to sin, ask themselves some such questions as these:

\* Luke xvi. 28. \* Jude 7. \* Mark ix. 44. \* Rev. xx. 10.

\* The Bible. \* 2 Theff. i. 9. \* 1 Cor. vi.



‘What is it I hazard my soul for?—For pleasures that I shall soon be sick of; for riches that I shall leave in a very short time; and for a world that will forget me as soon as I am gone. What will it profit me, when this pleasure I am so fond of will certainly be bitterness in the end? When this unjust gain will be followed with the loss of my soul? When this tenderness of myself, which will *now* not suffer me to mortify my corruptions, will be punished with everlasting burnings?’

These thoughts, good Christians, if kept in your memory, and pondered in your hearts, will help to preserve you from ruin, in the midst of a most profligate age—an age in which there are people who neither fear God nor what he can do to them, who can laugh at damnation, who can wish it to themselves and others without trembling, and who are in the certain way to the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, without caring what will become of them. These, Christians should have no fellowship with, as they value their own souls, as ever they expect the favour of God, as ever they hope for the happiness of Heaven.

THE HAPPINESS OF HEAVEN is another of those motives which our gracious God would not let us want, that we may have all the encouragement imaginable to fit ourselves for that happy state and place. A place, as the Spirit of God represents it, where there is neither *want*, nor *sorrow*, nor *sickness*, nor *pain*, nor *oppression*, nor *afflictions*, nor *troubles*, of any kind. But the happiness of that state no mortal can comprehend: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,” [faith St. Paul, 1 Cor. ii. 9.] “neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”

You will not sure hear these things with indifference; or return home without considering, over and over again, the happiness of Heaven, and the way to be secure of it when you die.

I will endeavour to help your meditations upon this subject, and shew you how you may and ought to profit by such sermons.—Every Christian should reason thus with himself:—‘I have the sure word of God for it, that my condition when I die will be infinitely happy, even beyond what I can imagine, if it is not my own fault. At the same time, God has given me to understand, that before I can be fit for heaven, my nature must be changed; that I must love him with all my heart and soul, and that, for his sake, I must love all mankind, otherwise I cannot be admitted into that blessed society. He has also shewed me

the way how I may attain *these holy dispositions*, which are so absolutely necessary to fit me for heaven. That in order to love him with all my heart, I must believe in him, and give entire credit to every thing which he has made known to us. That I must fear him—fear to do any thing that I believe will displease him. That I must obey him—do what he has commanded, and avoid what he has forbidden. That I must submit to all his choices for me, and endeavour that my heart may always go along with my lips in this petition—*THY WILL BE DONE*. That I must give him the honour due unto his name; *speak* of him with reverence; *worship* him with great devotion; *pray* to him for what I want; and give him *praise* and *thanks* for all his mercies. And lastly, that I must close with the means of grace which he has ordained for my edification, and by which he will give me the earnest of his Holy Spirit. By observing these rules, I shall come to love God with all my heart, and be qualified for that happiness for which he created me.

‘In order TO LOVE MY NEIGHBOUR, which is another qualification for heaven and happiness, I must neither *do* nor *wish* any ill to him. I must remember, “that whosoever hateth his brother, is a murderer; and that no murderer has any inheritance in the kingdom of heaven.” All *bitterness*, and *wrath*, and *anger*, and *clamour*, and *strife*, and *evil speaking*, and *malice*, must, as the Apostle exhorts, “be put away from such as hope for the happiness of heaven.” We must be both just and charitable, “ready to give, and glad to distribute.” We must *forgive*, and *give*, as becomes brethren and the disciples of Jesus Christ.—These are the ways by which we are to *express*, and *gain*, and *increase*, that love for our neighbour which must qualify us for Heaven.

‘And in the last place, with regard to my own self, God has made known to me, what qualifications are necessary to make me worthy to be partaker of the inheritance with the Saints in Heaven. That I must be *humble*, for God hateth and resisteth the proud. I must be *chaste*, for no unclean person can enter into heaven. I must be *temperate* and *sober*, lest that day overtake me unawares. That as I hope to follow my Saviour to Heaven, I must deny myself, and take up the cross; I must mortify my affections and lusts; keep under my body and bring it into subjection; part with any thing, as dear as a *right hand* or a *right eye*, rather than do what will offend God, and shut me out of heaven. Lastly,

1 John iii. 15.

Ephes. iv. 31.



• he has commanded me to *watch*, to *walk*  
• *circumspectly*; to keep my heart with all  
• *diligence*; because I have an adversary,  
• which, like a roaring lion, is continually  
• seeking to ruin me.

• These things I must endeavour to re-  
• member, as I love my soul, and as I hope  
• for heaven; and I must order my life ac-  
• cordingly: for so has Christ expressly told  
• us, “Not every one that saith unto me,  
• “Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom  
• of heaven; but he that doeth the will of  
• “my Father which is in heaven.”

This, my Christian brethren, is the way  
we must take *to profit by sermons* upon these  
important subjects. It is thus we must en-  
deavour to affect our minds, that we may  
*remember*, that we may *never forget*, these  
truths, which concern us as much as our  
souls are worth. This being the only way  
to be secure of a blessed eternity, to be ever  
and anon asking ourselves some such short  
questions as these:—

• Why am I afraid of death? Why do I  
• put the thoughts of it far from me? Is it  
• not because I know that I am not prepared  
• to die? Have I considered how miserable  
• I shall be, if death should surprize me  
• either doing evil, or doing nothing, or do-  
• ing that which was not my duty to do? Is  
• it because I fancy that I have time suffi-  
• cient before me to prepare for death? But  
• then I forget, *that a Christian life is the*  
• *only sure preparation for death*; and I for-  
• get also what Jesus Christ hath declared,  
• “Thou shalt not know what hour I will  
• come upon thee.” Is not this the time  
• in which I am to chuse whether I am to be  
• miserable or happy for ever? And shall I  
• let this time slip out of my hands? Do not  
• I know, that I shall come out of the grave

• Rev. iii. 3.

• just as I go into it, either fit for heaven, or  
• fit for no place but hell? Have not I my-  
• self seen many surprized by death when  
• they least thought of it; and were amazed  
• when they saw that it was too late to bring  
• forth fruits answerable to amendment of  
• life? What, if this uncomfortable case  
• should be my own!

One would ask further—“What will this  
life I lead end in? Will my great Judge  
approve of this way of spending my time,  
my estate, and the other talents he has in-  
trusted me with? Can I hope to hear him  
say, *Well done, good and faithful servant,*  
*enter thou into the joy of thy Lord?* Or will  
not the manner of my life oblige him to say,  
*Thou wicked servant, thou hast done nothing*  
*that I commanded thee?* What is it I am  
losing my inheritance in heaven for? For  
some poor pleasure; for some pitiful gain;  
or to gratify some filthy lust? Can I ima-  
gine that the glorious inheritance of the  
children of God must cost me no pains, no  
trouble, to attain it, when it cost my Sa-  
viour his life to purchase it for me?—  
Lastly; let me ask myself that question,  
which my Saviour has put into my mouth,  
*What shall a man give in exchange for his*  
*soul?* What pains ought I not to take, ra-  
ther than run the hazard of suffering the  
bitter pains of eternal death?

Let these things, Christians, enter deep  
into your hearts; do not forget them as  
soon as you leave the church; beg of God to  
give you grace to profit by them. And be  
assured of this, that there is no greater hap-  
piness in this life, than to have reasonable  
hopes of a blessed eternity: Which God  
grant we may all have, and that we may  
meet in peace in the paradise of God, for  
the Lord Jesus' sake.

To whom, &c.



## S E R M O N V.

## THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY SERMONS.

LUKE xi. 28.

*Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.<sup>b</sup>*

**Y**OU have here the Word of Christ for this important truth, That the preaching of the Gospel, the hearing it with attention and zeal, and leading a life answerable thereunto, is a sure way to blessedness or happiness.

You know the doom of those who heard the sermons of Christ, and would not mind them: "It shall" (saith our Saviour and Judge) "it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that people." By which you see, Christians, the great hazard you will run, if you live under the light and ordinances of the Gospel, and are not bettered by them.

Our Saviour himself tells you, who it is that tempts you to hear the Word with indifference, and to forget what you hear; to despise the preacher, and the ordinance of God. He tells you, that it is the Devil, that taketh the word out of the hearts of those that are not careful to keep it, lest they should believe and be saved.

Lastly; you may be assured of it, that the Word preached will become the word of salvation to every one that believeth; to every one who comes to hear with a teachable temper of mind, with a serious purpose and desire to learn his duty, and with a resolution to practise what he hears.

My design in this discourse (as it has been in several others) is, to shew you *how you may best profit by the Sermons you hear*; that you may return from the house of God with benefit, and with a blessing.

In order to this, I will propose to you several subjects of importance, and shew you how every Christian should apply what he hears to himself.

But in the first place, as ever you hope to profit by what you read or hear, endeavour to discharge your heart of a too great fondness for the world and its idols.

It is not *I*, but our Lord himself assures you, that let the seed be never so good, yet if it be sown among thorns, they will choak it at last; that is, as he himself explains it, "The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things, will choak the word, and it will become unfruitful."

I. *A too great fondness*, therefore, *for the things of this world*, or what we call COVETOUSNESS, being the greatest hindrance to piety and Christian knowledge, we will first consider this evil, and the great mischiefs that attend it.

"Take heed," saith our Saviour,<sup>c</sup> "and beware of Covetousness." Can we imagine that he would have given Christians this *double*, this *earnest* caution, but that he knew that there is something in this sin very destructive. And you will be convinced there is, if you will attend to what follows.

*First*; That no man can possibly love God, whose heart is set upon the world, let him pretend what he will. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." So saith the Spirit of God.<sup>d</sup>

*Secondly*; It leads men insensibly into Atheism; that is, to depend more upon themselves and upon their own industry and wealth, than upon God, his providence, and blessing.

*Thirdly*; It strangely tempts men to believe, that any thing almost is lawful, which will but increase their substance.

*Fourthly*; It most surprisingly changeth the heart, and dispositions of men. A compassionate man, once possessed with a spirit of covetousness, becomes hard-hearted; a liberal temper becomes stingy; and he that was charitable before now grudges every penny he parts with.

<sup>c</sup> Matth. xiii. 22. <sup>d</sup> Luke xii. 15. <sup>e</sup> 1 John ii. 15.

<sup>b</sup> See Levit. xxv. 14. Prov. iii. 9. xiv. 33. xviii. 3. xix. 17. Ps. xvii. 14. xxxvii. 2. Isaiah iii. 15. Matth. vi. 19, 25. Luke iii. 14. xvi. 9. 1 Cor. vi. 10. Eph. vi. 28, 1 Tim. iv. 6, 9, 10, 17. Heb. xiii. 5.

It



It is branded in Scripture with the name of *Idolatry*, because it tempts men to have such an esteem for wealth, as if their life and *happiness* depended upon having a great deal. And that which still makes this sin more hateful to God is this, that it is (what the Spirit of God calls it) **THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL**;—the root of *every evil*, of *injustice*, of *oppression*, of *extortion*, of *cheating* one another, of *thieving*, of *contention*, of *law-suits*, of wishing for the death of parents, &c.

In short, it is a damnable sin; and whoever lives in it is in a state of perdition: And it has this sad circumstance attending it, that few can be persuaded that they are guilty of it, and therefore cannot be persuaded to repent of it. And yet, no doubt of it, a sin branded in Scripture with being *the root of all evil* must of necessity be known by such as are guilty of it, if it is not their own fault, that they may be left without excuse.

Any man, for instance, may conclude for certain that he is under the power of this evil spirit, when he is more intent upon the world than in taking care of his soul; when his love of gain puts him upon suspicious ways and means of increasing his substance; or denying his neighbour his rights. Suspicious, I mean, to himself; for even *that* ought to hinder a good man from doing any thing which he *does but fear* may displease God, or injure another.

To proceed:—That person is possessed with a *spirit of covetousness*, who has such an opinion and esteem for wealth as if it could make him happy. Such a man, saith the Prophet,<sup>s</sup> “coveteth an evil covetousness to “his house, that he may set his nest on “high, and be delivered from the power “of evil;” that is, that he may depend upon himself, be out of the reach of misfortunes, and be independent upon God’s providence.

Thirdly; A man may know whether his care and concern for the world does not often make him omit the duties he owes to God and to himself, or perform them with indifference and distraction; when the time is often grudged in which they are performed; when the Lord’s day is profaned by unnecessary worldly business, and such business made use of as a pretence for neglecting family duties. When a man shews no gratitude to God for the favours he has bestowed upon him, by doing a proportionable good with them; and when his concern for himself makes him unconcerned for those that want his help. When a man’s mind is distracted with imaginary fears of wanting; or

who makes his necessities greater than indeed they are, and therefore can never be satisfied with his present condition. Lastly; when every disappointment, every loss or misfortune, casts him into trouble, grief, or despair, not being permitted to consider, that it is from God, who orders all things for the best. These are all instances of *that covetousness* which the Scripture condemns as leading to perdition. And whoever *is*, or is in danger of being, possessed with this spirit, (for that such are possessed with an evil spirit, one need no more question, than that Judas was possessed with such a spirit when Satan entered into him;) whoever is in this sad circumstance had need to get out of the snare of the devil as soon as possible.

We should now proceed to consider how this is to be done; but it will be necessary to take notice, first, of what is but too often made use of as a cloak for this sin.

The Apostle saith, “He that provideth “not for his own, and especially for those of “his own house, or kindred, hath forfeited “the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”<sup>n</sup>

People are apt to think that this will justify them, let them be never so worldly-minded. When in truth, (and they will find it is so, if they will but look into their Bibles) the Apostle is not directing Christians to provide estates for their children, but to take care of their poor relations, and not let others be burthened with them.

We come now to consider, what use a serious Christian should make upon hearing the *nature*, the *deceitfulness*, the *danger*, and the *end*, of this sin. Now; a Christian who desires to profit by what he hears will think thus with himself:—

‘I have heard what the Spirit of God  
‘saith; that “every covetous man, who is  
‘an idolater, hath no inheritance in the king-  
‘dom of God.” And shall not so terrible  
‘a truth put a stop to an over-greedy desire  
‘of getting more than I really want? I see  
‘what my duty is. It is to labour in my  
‘proper business; depending upon God’s  
‘blessing; without disquieting myself with  
‘unreasonable fears of wanting. And this  
‘I am to do; first, in order to supply my  
‘own and the necessities of those that be-  
‘long to me; and then, to supply the ne-  
‘cessities of those that are in want. I will  
‘not let the hurry of business, therefore,  
‘(will every serious Christian say) I will not  
‘let worldly business hinder me from serving  
‘God, because I serve myself most when I  
‘serve him. I will endeavour always to re-  
‘member, that I am in the hands of God,  
‘who has commanded us “to cast all our  
‘care upon him, for he careth for us;”<sup>k</sup>—and

<sup>s</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 10.    <sup>n</sup> Hab. ii. 9.    <sup>k</sup> 1 Tim. v. 8.    <sup>l</sup> Eph. v. 5.    <sup>m</sup> 1 Pet. v. 7.



‘ who, having given us life even before we could ask it, will never let us want the necessary means of preserving it. I will beg of God, that he will grant me grace to make a good use of what he shall give me, which will be a sure way of obtaining more favours from him.

‘ And since the Spirit of God assures me, that when I do good to others I do most good to myself, I will therefore endeavour to make myself friends against the great day, *by giving alms of such things as I have, as our Lord commands us.*<sup>1</sup> And because I cannot have a better rule than that which the Apostle has given us,<sup>2</sup> (will every serious Christian say who lives by GAIN) *I will constantly lay by me in store as God hath prospered me, that I may have to give to him that needeth. And that I may do this more chearfully, I will beg of God to preserve me from an evil spirit of covetousness; and that I may lay up in store a good foundation against the time to come.*

‘ In order to this, I will often call to mind such scriptures as these:—“ That wealth profiteth not in the day of wrath;” either when we fall into affliction, or when we come to die. “ Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee: then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?”<sup>3</sup> “ So (saith our Lord) is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich towards God;” that is, employing his riches to God’s glory, or transmitting them to heaven by the hands of the poor. “ Remember,” saith Abraham to the rich man, “ that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things;” the things in which thou didst place thy very soul and happiness; “ and likewise Lazarus, evil things; but now he is comforted and thou art tormented.”

Will any Christian, after this, call those his *good things*, which may be lost when he least thinks of it; that he cannot keep without fear, nor part with without vexation; which tempt us to forget God; are a snare to us while we live, and may, without a mighty grace, be a curse to us when we are dead? Rather let us all beg of God to convince us most effectually of the vanity of all the idols of this world, which we are but too apt to doat on, that we may not, like unbelievers, look for happiness here; and especially, that God would keep us from every degree of a sin, which is the mother of so many evils.

What those evils are, we now come to take a short view of; that as we value our souls, we may abhor and avoid them.

<sup>1</sup> Luke ii. 41. <sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 2. <sup>3</sup> Luke xii. 20. <sup>4</sup> Luke xvi. 25.

II. The first we shall consider, is that of *Oppression*; when a man bears hard upon his neighbour, because it is in the power of his hand to do it; or when it is not in the power of his neighbour to contend with him. Or, secondly, when a man’s necessities force him to submit to the very hardest terms his neighbour thinks fit to impose upon him. Or, thirdly, when a man will take all the advantage of a hard bargain which the law will give him, though it be to the great loss of his neighbour.

These, and such as these, are very great crimes, and will shut men out of heaven, though no law on earth can take hold of those that are guilty of them. And indeed nobody thinks them small crimes when they themselves come to be the sufferers.

Hear what the Spirit saith of these sins:—  
“ He that oppresseth the poor, to increase his riches, shall surely come to want.”  
“ Oppress not the poor;”<sup>1</sup> that is, those that are not able to contend with you; “ the Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.” But, above all, hear these terrible words of God: “ Oppressors, extortioners, shall not inherit the kingdom of God,” and then you know what they must inherit.

III. INJUSTICE is another sin to which a spirit of covetousness leads men. I shall not take notice of those instances of injustice which the laws of men *may* and *ought* to punish, and do the sufferers right, without making it cost them more than it is worth.

There are other instances of injustice, as evil in the sight of God, and as damnable in the end, though people make a shift to live in them, without public reproach, or check of conscience: Such are, *taking advantage* of men’s mistakes, ignorance, simplicity, and the like.

I will put you in mind of instances of this kind, that you may avoid the sin and the punishment.

If a man is in drink, he is, in the very language of the world, *over-seen*. Now, if in such a condition he happens to fall into bad hands, and makes a bargain, it is ten to one but he repents when he is sober, and too often his family smart for it. Shall I go about to prove, that it is a sin to insist upon such a bargain? Every man who has a conscience knows it to be so; but perhaps every body does not remember what God has expressly declared, “ That he will be the avenger of all such as go beyond or defraud another in any matter.”

How easily may a poor man, who has a righteous cause, mistake, or be unable to

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxii. 16, 23. <sup>2</sup> Zech. vii. 10. <sup>3</sup> 1 Theff. iv. 6.

defend



defend it: But will his oversight or inability give me or you a right to that, to which in truth we had no just title; or will the judgment of a court lessen the injustice, when it comes to be tried at the great day?

To feed a man with money when I know he has no real occasion, only that I may get a bargain of his estate when he shall be forced to sell it; this is thought to be no great crime; and yet it is plain I help to ruin him, and perhaps his family; and if he sins in squandering the inheritance of his forefathers, is it possible for me to be without guilt?

Because, in wronging *orphans* and *widows*, and *poor people*, a man has less powerful people to deal with, is he therefore less wicked? No, sure; so far from it, that God has declared himself concerned in such causes:—"Their Redeemer (saith Solomon) is mighty; he shall plead their cause with thee."

How often do wills and writings of moment, and even other things of value, fall into the hands of persons to whom they do not belong! The sin of concealing such things is looked upon as a less sin than stealing: but for no reason, I am sure, but because in one case he may be in danger of being hanged, if he is caught; and in the other, he will only be called a dishonest man, which such a man will not lay much to heart. But Christians should consider, that the judgment of a righteous God will not be according to the foolish opinion of men.

It is too common for people to conceal and keep what they have found. Such people do not sure know, that there is an express law of God against such practices; nor do they ever think how they shall answer it at the great day of accounts.

If a man will take all advantages which the law will give him, he will very often do great injustice in the sight of God, and make himself liable to *Restitution*, without which his repentance and salvation will be very hazardous. And indeed a man must love the world exceeding well, even better than his own soul, who will put his neighbour to trouble, grief, and expence, to seek for his rights in equity, when he knows beforehand that in equity he will or ought to be relieved.

But the sins of fraud and injustice, which are most common and least taken notice of, are such as are committed in the way of trade and bargains. The Wise Man has given all people fair warning of this: "As a nail sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling." Every Christian therefore, who

desires to keep a good conscience, will be glad to have such rules to walk by, as he needs not be deceived, unless he be willing to be deceived. Such is that of our Saviour's:

"Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets." Which, though a general rule, may by a well-meaning Christian be applied to all our dealings one with another; while those that are resolved to be rich, whatever shall be the consequence, all the rules of the Gospel, though never so well explained, will be of little use to them. But for such as do really make a conscience of their ways, one would endeavour to make their way plain and safe.

Now; Gain being the great and just end of trade, of which every man for himself must be judge, and consequently too apt to be favourable to his own interest, I shall therefore recommend one very plain rule, which will go a great way towards directing every conscientious man of business, how to act safely with regard to gain. And this is,—to take such a gain, advantage, or consideration, as the person with whom I deal would be satisfied with, if he knew my business as well as I do myself, and the reasons which oblige me to take such a profit. Whoever makes this his rule, his conscience will never reproach him of injustice. But if, instead of doing so, men will take all that they can get; make an hand of the ignorance, necessities, or simplicity, of those with whom they deal; they do what they must know to be unjust, and make themselves liable to one of the most difficult duties of Christianity, and that is, *RESTITUTION*, without which their repentance will not be accepted of God.

But before we come to consider this duty of Restitution, I would add a few words concerning the now common, but scandalous, crimes of *pilfering* and *stealing*.

I am very sensible, that few of those who have fallen into these base, bewitching sins, will mind what can be said from the pulpit or from the Word of God. The Spirit of God saith indeed,\* that "a curse or evil spirit entereth into the house of the thief, to consume it with the timber and stones." But what will this signify to those that have neither faith, nor religion, nor shame, nor fear?

But it will not, one would hope, be in vain to advise those who are not yet arrived to this height of sinning—to repent and leave it in time; for, be assured of it, that when a spirit of pilfering has once taken possession of a man, it will, if not resisted, lead him to every degree of that sin, till it brings him to ruin both of soul and body; and that it will be as difficult for him, what-

\* Prov. xxiii. 11.    † Levit. vi.    ‡ Eccles. xxvii. 2.

§ Matth. vii. 12.

¶ Zech. v. 4.



ever his condition in the world afterwards may be, to break off an habit of stealing, as it is for a drunkard, or a whoremaster, or a common swearer, to leave off those vices that are become a second nature to them.

How exceeding careful, therefore, should parents be to discourage every the least degree of this sin, every shadow of it; to warn their children, over and over again, against so base, so scandalous a vice, which is so hard to be forsaken, so hard to be repented of. For *restitution* must be made, for all the sins we have been speaking of, as ever men hope for salvation, at least in the sincere endeavour.

I will no more go about to prove that *RESTITUTION is a necessary duty*, than I would take pains to persuade you that *ROBBING is a sin*. Every man's conscience, every man who dare ask his conscience, must tell him so. And if any man is easy under the guilt of this sin, he will be easy under the guilt of any other sin. For sure the same reason and justice, which oblige me to restore what I have borrowed, will oblige me to make restitution for what I have wronged a man of. This being a certain truth, that all a man gets wrongfully is theft and robbery, and no better. Therefore, delay not, Christians, at the peril of your souls, to make satisfaction for any injustice or wrong you have done, while it is in your power. And if any scruple arises in your breast concerning the way of doing it, go to your Pastor, or to some person of judgment and discretion, who may be able to silence your doubts, and quiet your conscience. Without doing this, a man of any thought can have no comfort either living or dying. This day, saith our Saviour to Zaccheus, "This day is salvation come to thy house." So that until he had sincerely resolved to make restitution, he was not in a state of salvation, he was in a state of perdition.

The Law of God to the Israelites<sup>1</sup> is so particular upon this head, that I must repeat it to you. "If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbour in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbour, or hath found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it; he shall restore it in the principal, and add a fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth. And then the Priest shall receive his trespass-offering, and make an atonement for him, and it shall be forgiven him." And pray take notice, that this command did not concern such as were convicted of

<sup>1</sup> Luke xix. 8.<sup>2</sup> Levit. vi. 2, &c.

these crimes of injustice before a magistrate, but such whose own conscience accused them, and who desired peace and pardon from God.

This was the way prescribed by God himself. This is the voice of the Law and the Gospel; and, let me add, of natural reason: for every body who has been wronged expects satisfaction; and, if it is denied by men, is apt to appeal to God for justice and vengeance. So that the most ignorant know their duty in this case, and if they are loath to make restitution, it is because the fear of God is not in their hearts. They will venture their souls rather than part with what they have got.

Christians therefore, who wish well to themselves, and are convinced of the absolute necessity of this duty, will think beforehand, when they are tempted to any of the sins we have been speaking of—they will think what a bitter cup they are preparing for themselves if they give way to such temptations.

Christians would do well to consider, how it was with Judas when his conscience was awake: He valued the thirty pieces of silver no more than the very earth he trod upon; he flung them away; he confessed his injustice before the world; and would have given the world, if he had had it, to have had it in his power to have undone what he had been guilty of. And surely, this will be the case of every one, either now or hereafter, who knows he has done wrong, and will not be persuaded to make timely satisfaction.

On the other hand, a Christian who resolves to do his duty in this instance to the best of his power, (for God expects no more) by doing so, he gives glory to God; he acknowledges the justice of his laws, the power he has to punish offenders, his mercy in accepting the repentance of sinners upon the most equitable conditions; he shews, that he fears God, and that he values the favour of God more than his own profit or his own reputation; and has the surest proof and comfort, that his repentance is sincere, and his sin forgiven.

I shall conclude this article of Restitution with the words of that excellent godly Divine, Bishop BEVERIDGE: "All persons that ever wronged any man of any thing, are bound to make restitution. All that by forging, or concealing of deeds, or tampering with witnesses, have got possession of other men's estates. All that by robbing, or any kind of theft, have stolen what was their neighbour's. All servants and apprentices, who neglect their master's business, embezzle or purloin his goods. All that by false measures

or



“ or weights impose upon their customers.  
 “ All that conceal the faults of the goods  
 “ they sell. All that cheat or over-reach  
 “ those they deal with. All that by any  
 “ wicked artifice defraud their creditors of  
 “ what is their due. All that by smuggling  
 “ of goods, forswearing themselves, or bri-  
 “ bing of others, withhold from the King  
 “ any part of his customs, or other reve-  
 “ nues, which the laws of God and of the  
 “ land have given him a just right to. In  
 “ short, all that have been either principals  
 “ or accessaries in wronging any man of any  
 “ thing, they are bound to make full resti-  
 “ tution.” Thus far that good man.

Now every serious Christian, who hears these things and lays them to heart, will reason and resolve with himself after some such way as this:—

“ I see plainly that I must not judge of the  
 “ greatness of the sins of injustice and fraud,  
 “ by the opinion and way of the world, but  
 “ by the authority of God who has forbidden  
 “ them, by the punishments he has threat-  
 “ ened, and by the mischiefs that attend  
 “ them. Such sins, being committed without  
 “ remorse, are too often forgotten; and, it  
 “ is to be feared, are too seldom repented of.  
 “ I will not therefore let the love of the  
 “ world possess my soul, lest it choke the  
 “ seed of God’s Word sown in my heart,  
 “ and those Truths which should keep me  
 “ from ruin. Such as these: *He that baseth  
 “ to be rich, can hardly be innocent.*” That all  
 “ depends upon the blessing of God, which  
 “ cannot be hoped for in unrighteous ways.  
 “ That every man living has a right to be  
 “ dealt with fairly and with justice. That  
 “ neither life nor happiness consisteth in the  
 “ abundance any man possesseth. That it  
 “ will be no advantage to a man to have dou-  
 “ bled his talents, if at the same time he  
 “ has doubled his guilt. That posterity will  
 “ feel the effects of my injustice; God having  
 “ declared, *that he will lay up the iniquities of  
 “ sinners for their children.* And lastly, *that  
 “ there is nothing that a man can get in ex-  
 “ change for his soul.*”

These considerations, I will dwell upon, will every serious Christian say, when he has heard them from the pulpit, or from God’s Word. And may this be the resolution of every soul who has now heard these things, and attended to them! In order to this, I will leave a few things with you to be remembered.

Suppose, for example, you should see one of your poor neighbours wronged, or depri-

<sup>c</sup> Prov. xxviii. 20.

<sup>d</sup> Job. xx. 28.

ved of his just rights or goods, by robbery, by oppression, or by fraud. To see a whole family in trouble; their minds uneasy; their health and rest broken; their necessary business neglected; tempted to murmur against God; and to curse such as have been the occasion of their trouble. Let, I say, any body who has the least spark of humanity, grace, or goodness, see this; and say, whether this will not make him abhor, and resolve against, every instance of injustice, violence, and fraud, which must of necessity give his neighbour so much sorrow and grief of heart.

If this does not affect every one that sees or hears of it, (for there may be some people so destitute of humanity and grace, that provided they be easy, and can get or keep what they have gotten, are not much concerned for the sufferings of others.) Let us suppose we saw such a man upon his death-bed; his eyes open, his conscience awake, and calling to mind the evil he has done his neighbour, whether by cunning, power, violence, or fraud; dreading the consequence; not knowing how to make satisfaction for the injuries he has done; ashamed to own his crimes, and yet not able to bear the thoughts of them; just going to leave the world under the greatest uncertainties of what is like to be his portion in a very few hours perhaps. Can there be a case, a condition, more terrible, more miserable, than this? And yet, how many are there, who, in all human appearances leave the world under these most astonishing circumstances!

Lastly; suppose people should be so thoughtless, so stupid, so ignorant, as to die without remorse, or fear; is their case any better than that of those who die under the fear of God’s displeasure? Can it be imagined, that their ignorance or unconcernedness will alter the decrees of God, who has expressly declared, that they that have done evil, and have not repented, shall go into everlasting fire? This should hinder Christians from doing to others what they would not have done to themselves.

THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF—with such a love as worketh no ill to his neighbour. Believe it, Christians, mine and your salvation depends upon the observation of this command of God.

I pray God we may remember it; and pardon us whenever through frailty we are wanting to our duty, for Jesus Christ’s sake.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, &c.



## S E R M O N VI.

## THE TRUE WAY OF PROFITING BY THE PUBLICK WORSHIP.

VOUCHSAFE, O God, to direct me; and to bless this Discourse to the benefit of my Flock, and to all such as shall hear it; that they may glorify Thee for the Truths they shall learn, and for the Blessings they shall receive by my Ministry; through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

I COR. XIV. 15.

*I will pray with the Understanding.<sup>a</sup>*

**W**HEN one sees Christians coming constantly to church, without any visible benefit; without becoming more serious and devout at their prayers, or more regular in their lives; one cannot but conclude, either that they never ask those graces which they want, or that *they ask and have not, because they ask amiss.*

This is certain, that there is not any one grace, not one good thing, which either in duty, interest, or charity, we are bound to pray for, but what our Church has provided us proper prayers by which to ask them: And it is as certain, that God will HEAR US, and grant our petitions, “*whenever we ask any thing according to his will.*”

There must, therefore, be some *very great fault*, when the generality of Christians (to the great scandal of the Religion they profess) do, all their life long, pray for graces and blessings which they never obtain. They must have been either *ignorantly, or carelessly, or wilfully*, wanting to themselves, when they return so often from the House of God without benefit, and without a blessing; when it is most certain, that God designed these solemn meetings as the greatest of blessings,—as the best opportunity of fitting ourselves for heaven and happiness.

We will therefore consider, what may be the real cause of so *great unfruitfulness* under such powerful ordinances, and means of grace and salvation.

In the first place, then, it is but too plain that very many come to church merely out of custom; many only to avoid the reproach of having no religion; and most of all do not consider what they come to church for, what they want, what they pray for. And so it comes to pass, that Christians confess their sins without being sensible of the danger of

being sinners. They hear the most gracious terms of pardon declared, and the absolution pronounced, without receiving the comfort and benefit thereof. They repeat the most divine and powerful prayer of our Lord, without considering the Majesty of Him to whom they speak, or his wonderful goodness in permitting them to come to him as to a father. They repeat his praises in the psalms and hymns without any true devotion; and they hear his word, his commands, his promises, and his judgments, without being moved by them to mend their lives.

In short, they solemnly profess their faith in God; they ask of him all necessary graces and blessings; they say *Amen* to prayers which they have never attended to; and hear a blessing pronounced by the Minister of God, to which God has annexed an especial grace and blessing: And, after all this, too often return home—without any benefit, without a *blessing*.

Our Saviour Christ will give you the true reason of this: “*This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*” This was the case of the Jews before their final destruction. Let us take care that this be not our case and our fate.

To prevent this, I will set before you *the true way of profiting by the publick worship of God*; and what every devout Christian, who hopes for God’s blessing, *should endeavour to do, in order to obtain it.*

He *should, in the first place*, endeavour (when he is about to go to worship God) he should endeavour to possess his heart with a true sense of his sad condition without the grace of God. This is, by the Spirit of God, most lively represented in these words, “*Thou say’st, I have need of nothing; and knowest not, that thou art wretched, and*

<sup>a</sup> See Isaiah i. 15. xxix. 13. Ezek. xxxiii. 31. Eph. vi. 7, 8, 9. 1 Tim. v. 8. <sup>b</sup> 1 John v. 14. <sup>c</sup> Matth. xv. 7.



"miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." This is *your's*, and *mine*, and *every man's* sad condition by nature, and destitute of the grace of God. We are *wretched and miserable* sinners; and, unless God pardon us, we are for ever undone. We are *poor and weak* creatures, in danger (as Job was) of being ruined by our adversary the Devil. We are *blind*, and in the dark, as to every thing relating to our happiness or misery. And we are *naked*, and destitute of every virtue that might recommend us to the favour of God.

These are the thoughts which we should take along with us to the house of God; and we should consider what we are going thither for; namely, to beg of God to pardon and forgive us our sins; to give God thanks for the mercies and favours which he has vouchsafed us; to learn how we may live so as to please God; to make a publick and open profession of our faith; and to ask such things as are needful both for our souls and bodies. This is truly to pray with the understanding.

Now; every Christian, who has these things in his mind and at heart, will, when he goes to Church, be very serious; endeavour to lay aside all worldly thoughts; and will beg of God to dispose and assist him in the work he is going about. And it is for this reason that all well-taught Christians do fall upon their knees as soon as they come into the Church, and pray to God to prevent them by his grace and spirit. And, that the most unlearned Christian may not want words, the Church has provided a most excellent prayer, to be made use of before we begin any work of moment; and which all Christians may learn, being so often repeated in the public service, as follows: "Prevent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour," &c.

And here let me give you, and beg you to remember, one most excellent rule of a Christian life,—never to undertake any business without praying to God, in this or some such prayer, to prevent and prosper you. Whoever conscientiously observes this rule, will be hindered from doing many things which the world counts innocent, and which must afterwards be repented of. For who *can*, who *dare*, say this prayer, and beg of God to prevent him with his gracious favour, and further him with his help, when he is going to do thing a which he knows, or suspects, either to be unjust, unfit for a Christian man to do, or displeasing to God?

Let us now return to the consideration of the Publick Worship. And I must repeat it again, and beseech you to remember it, that the only way to have your persons and your

prayers accepted is, to come before God with an *humble, penitent, and obedient heart*. It is for this reason you are put in mind, "that a broken and contrite heart God will not despise." And you have a convincing proof of this, in the person of the Publican, mentioned by our Saviour; who, out of a deep sense of his sins and unworthiness, "durst not lift up his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, *God be merciful unto me a sinner.*" Which holy indignation, and condemning himself after so penitent a manner, procured for him the pardon of his sins; the very greatest blessing he could, or we can, ask or obtain of God.

On the other hand; if we present ourselves before God, after a careless, indecent manner, with a vain confidence and satisfaction that we are not as great sinners as some others, our very prayers will be turned into sin, and we shall leave the Church without a *pardon*, and without a  *blessing*. To prevent this, when you hear the sentences read with which the publick service begins, attend to them with seriousness: and in order to stir up your devotion, apply them to yourself in some such short prayers as these following:—

For example: If this sentence shall be read, "When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness," &c. say secretly to yourself; *Turn Thou me, O good Lord, and so shall I be turned.* Or, if this sentence should be read; "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgivenesses," &c. you may say in your heart; *It is of the Lord's mercies that my sins have not been my ruin.* Or suppose this sentence has been read; "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart," &c. you may say in your heart; *But most unfit is mine to be to God presented, until I have obtained his pardon for the many sins by which it has been defiled.* Or if this sentence shall be read; "Turn unto the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger," &c. say secretly; *God grant that I may never abuse this goodness and patience of God, which is designed to lead me to repentance.* While this sentence is reading; "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee;" &c. think with yourself with what an humble, penitent heart this poor prodigal said these words, and endeavour to possess your own heart with the same devout affections. Lastly, when this sentence shall be read; "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," &c. a devout and penitent soul will pour out some such secret ejaculation as this: *The very best of men have need of mercy and pardon; how much more such a miserable sinner as I am!* "I will



“ will acknowledge my sin unto God, and  
“ mine iniquities will I not hide.”

By this method, you will keep your mind intent upon the great work you are about; you will go through the whole service with devotion; “ you will pray with the understanding:” And you will accustom yourself to apply every scripture to your own case.

But be sure you take this consideration along with you; and I beseech you to remember it as long as you live; *That you are not going to make your address to God for yourself only, but for every Christian in the whole world.* For, as we are all members of *that body* of which Jesus Christ is the head, we are every one of us bound (as we hope to meet in heaven) to pray for, and to do good to, every member of that body.—Think seriously of this, and it will quicken your charity, and mightily stir up your devotion, when you consider, that you are going to pray for millions of millions of Christians, and that millions of Christians are praying for you; and that, as you sincerely pray for others, God will most surely hear their prayers for you. And then, with what satisfaction and comfort will you leave the church, when you consider that you have been a real benefactor to an infinite number of miserable Christians;—by praying for all that are in error, or want the necessary means of instruction; for all that labour under trials and afflictions; for all that are in pain of body or anguish of mind; for all that are in slavery, under persecution, in poverty, or in prison; for all that are under temptations, or in danger of falling into despair; and lastly, for all sick and dying persons. Besides this, you have had an opportunity of shewing your gratitude, by praying, and praising God for all your benefactors; as also, of shewing your charity, by praying for your enemies; and lastly, of begging graces and blessings for all your friends and relations, and for all that have desired your prayers.

If any considerations will make a Christian serious and devout at his prayers, surely these will:—That he is doing a work the most pleasing to God; that he is going to do himself, and all his fellow Christians, the greatest good that can be thought of.

Well then, with *these* dispositions, and with *these* views, you begin your prayers in an HUMBLE CONFESSION of your own sins and the sins of all others; without which none of our prayers will be accepted; for a sinner can make no prayer that will be heard, but for the grace of conversion only.

When the congregation are making this confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon their knees; if there be any so ill

taught, or so ignorant of their duty, as willingly to refuse to put themselves into this humble posture, one may, without any breach of charity, conclude—*that man* does not know himself to be a miserable sinner; or he does not consider, that his prayers will be rejected; or he does not believe, that hell-fire will one day be the portion of unpardoned sinners; if he did, he would think no posture too painful by which he might obtain God’s pardon and blessing.

To proceed:—After this confession follows THE ABSOLUTION; not to be repeated by you, but by the Minister of God only; and in the name, and by the authority, of God.

Ignorant people may suggest, that we take upon us to *pardon sins*, which we acknowledge NONE BUT GOD CAN DO. But surely God can send *his* pardon, as well as a King can send *his*, by what hands he thinks fit. And if *he has committed this ministry of reconciliation to his own Ministers*, (as St. Paul assures us he has done) who will be so perverse as to refuse so great a mercy, though it come through the hands of a man like themselves?

Pray remember the behaviour of no less a man than King David; who thought himself happy that he could receive *absolution* by the mouth of his subject Nathan; who, upon his confession, declared, “ God hath “ put away thy sin, thou shalt not die.”

God bestows his blessings of pardon and peace according to his own appointment. He has appointed his Ministers to baptize you for the remission of sins: And in order to assure to you the pardon of your sins, they are ordained to administer to you the other Holy Sacrament.

Jesus Christ empowered his Ministers not only to pray for, but to give with effect, the blessings of peace and happiness, which none but God can give, to every son of peace, that is, to every person qualified to receive such a blessing.<sup>a</sup> Even so every Christian, duly qualified by true repentance and faith unfeigned, may have the comfort of hearing his pardon pronounced by God’s own ambassador, pursuant to Christ’s own power and authority.

But that God may render this pardon, by the mouth of his Minister, more effectual, every true penitent would do well to receive and apply it to himself in some such secret prayer as this following:—*May this pardon, O Lord, fall upon my soul, and seal the forgiveness of all my sins!* This one would recommend again and again to every devout Christian, as what would be attended with the greatest comfort and assurance of his pardon being sealed in heaven.

<sup>a</sup> 2 Sam. xii. 13.

<sup>b</sup> Luke x. 6.



The next thing which we are directed to do is, to address our Heavenly Father in a PRAYER appointed by the SON of GOD himself. This consideration should oblige us always to say this prayer with the greatest attention, deliberation, devotion, and zeal; that God may hear us according to the full importance of this most comprehensive prayer.

And now we are qualified to praise God, and to give him thanks for all his mercies; which we are to do in the following *Psalms* and *Hymns*: And pray take notice, that the *Psalms* are appointed to be read over no less than twelve times in every year, for this great and good reason; that we may learn (by hearing and repeating them so often) to pray to and praise God, in the very words or expressions of the Holy Ghost; which, to be sure, will always be most acceptable to the Divine Majesty.

Then follows a Lesson out of the OLD TESTAMENT. The Old Testament was written in order to establish the great article of a Divine Providence; and to give men right notions of God's glorious perfections, of his almighty power, his infinite wisdom, his justice, goodness, and truth.

When the Minister saith, Here beginneth the Lesson; say in your heart, God is going to speak to me; shall I not vouchsafe to hear him with attention? God grant that I may hear, and understand, and bring forth fruit an hundred fold!

It is in these books, that we have an account of what has happened from the creation to the coming of Christ, and particularly of the two states of man, his *innocency* and his *fall*. That God having made man, he promised to make him happy for ever, if he would be obedient to his commands: But man, failing in this, forfeited all his right to eternal happiness, and became subject to sin and to death. That to convince us of his infinite goodness, love, and mercy, from the moment man fell, God promised a Redeemer, for whose sake his repentance should be accepted, on condition he would live according to that light and reason which God had given him.

After this, men abusing their reason, and falling into idolatry, God gave them, by his servant Moses, written laws to walk by; and from time to time raised up Prophets, either to explain the true meaning of those laws, or to foreshew what would be the sad consequence of their persisting to provoke God by their wicked lives.

And to convince men of his infinite justice, and hatred of sin, it appears in these books that he has punished sinners in all ages, without respect of persons; once in

the destruction of the whole world, except eight persons; at another time, by fire and brimstone from Heaven; and by infinite other sore judgments, by the sword, famines, pestilence, and persecutions.

All these things were written for our instruction; that we may profit by hearing them read; and that we may learn to fear, and love, and obey, this great and good God, who can make us infinitely happy, or miserable beyond expression.

Remember therefore, I beseech you, our Saviour's words: "If they hear not (if they mind not) Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." So dreadful is the consequence of not attending to the Word of God when read in the Church!

After this follows one of the most devout Hymns of Praise that ever was made by man, to the praise of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to whom you were dedicated in baptism; beginning with these words: "We praise Thee, O God," &c.

That you may join with the Church with greater devotion, remember what God hath declared; "They that honour me, I will also honour."

Then will be read the Second Lesson out of the NEW TESTAMENT. In attending to what you hear out of the New Testament, you will be convinced, that it was one and the same Spirit which was the Author of both the Old and New.

Prepare yourself to hear the history of Christ Jesus your Saviour, and the manner of your redemption, as truths on which your salvation depends. Our Saviour himself gives us warning what will follow, if we do not mind these things: "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for people who have an opportunity of hearing the word of God, and despise it."

Here you have the terms of your salvation, and the example of your Saviour, set before you. Here you have an account of the Son of God, the promised Redeemer, taking our nature upon him; instructing us what we must believe, and what we must do, to be saved; suffering what our sins had deserved; satisfying the justice, and restoring us to the favour of God.

And that no man, no, not the most unlearned Christian, may be discouraged from reading and hearing the Scriptures, our Lord gives God thanks,\* for that he reveals these truths, and makes them easy to the humble, obedient, and willing Christian. And indeed the Gospel does not only teach

\* *Math. xi. 25.*



Christians their duty, but also inspires them with grace to understand, and power to perform it.<sup>a</sup>

That therefore you may profit by the Word of God, remember and observe these two rules:—First; apply what you hear as spoken to yourself. This *command*, this *promise*, this *threatening*, this *reproof*, this *direction*, this *warning*, I will take to myself. And secondly; fail not to beg of God, at the end of every Lesson, that he may enable you to understand, and love, and obey his Holy Word.

In this Word are contained ALL THE ARTICLES OF YOUR CHRISTIAN FAITH; which, that we may remember them the better, they are all summed up in THE APOSTLES' CREED, which ought to be repeated with great deliberation. And if every one would secretly beg of God, in the words of the Apostles, *Lord, increase my faith*, at the end of the Creed, God would most surely increase his faith, and it would become a sure shield against all the assaults of the Devil.

After this we proceed to make our prayers and supplications to God for the graces and blessings we stand in need of. For Kings, and all that are in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives: For the Ministers of God, who shew unto you the way of salvation; and to whom the word of reconciliation, and of life eternal, is committed: And lastly, for all estates and conditions of men, that our charity may render our prayers more acceptable to God.

The LITANY is a part of our service, which will be attended to, and joined in, by every devout Christian, who fears the judgments of God, or fears for himself.

And pray do not think that those often-repeated words, LET US PRAY, are said without reason. Every one knows for himself, how very apt our minds are to wander in prayer: And these words are designed, and should always put us in mind, TO WHOM WE ARE SPEAKING, that our thoughts may go along with our lips, when we speak to HIM who knows our hearts.

You cannot but observe, that we conclude all our prayers with some such expression as *this*,—through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that we may ever remember that it is for *his* sake, and for what he has done and suffered for us, that God gives us any thing we pray for.

When the Minister goes to the Altar, prepare to hear, with the greatest attention, the *Commandments of God*, which at your baptism you vowed to keep all the days of your

life. As often as these are read, you have an opportunity of seeing wherein you have offended against any of these commands, and of begging God's pardon for what is past, and his grace to observe them better for the time to come, in these most affecting words, which the Church has provided, *Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this Law*; which should never be hurried over, but said with the greatest devotion.

When the EPISTLE and GOSPEL are read, and you remember that they are portions of Sacred Scripture, taken out of the Book of your Salvation, you will hear them with greater attention.

Sometimes you will hear the most instructive Sermons or Parables of Christ; at other times you will hear the miracles he wrought for the confirmation of our faith.

And, to encourage us to follow his blessed example of patience, humility, submission to the will of God, and disregard for this world, we have set forth, in the *Gospel*, his most sure promise of grace and consolation while we live, and of happiness eternal when we die. And to hinder us from growing secure and careless, we shall often and often hear in these Gospels the dreadful doom which *unconverted, hardened, and impenitent* sinners shall surely meet with in the next world.

At certain solemn seasons, you have a particular account of what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for our redemption and salvation, that we may never forget his love.

And in the several *Epistles*, you will hear, every man his duty very particularly set down, in the words not of man, but (as they are indeed) the Words of God.

And some part or other of this Word you will hear every Lord's Day explained in the *Sermon*, and pressed upon you, in order to enlighten the minds of the ignorant, to awaken the consciences of the careless and profane, and such as hold the truth in unrighteousness. But then, as you hope to profit by Sermons, you must come to church with an humble and teachable temper; submitting to receive *instruction, reproof, and advice*, from the person whom the providence of God has set over you.

If the SACRAMENT of the *Lord's Supper* is to be administered, and you lightly turn your back upon that Holy Ordinance; you must not expect, that God will hear any of the prayers that you have made. *Do this in remembrance of me*, were the dying words of Jesus Christ. You refuse to obey this command, (for such in truth it is) and yet hope that God, for his sake, will hear you when you call upon him.

Do

<sup>a</sup> John vi. 63.



Do not deceive yourself. It is by this Sacrament, that the subjects of Christ are distinguished from the subjects of Satan. Have a care, therefore, lest it happen to you as it did to the Egyptians; lest the destroying Angel, finding you without the blood of the lamb, the mark of your high calling, should have power to destroy you.

Consider, that this Sacrament is to Christians what the Tree of Life was to Adam in Paradise; it was to make him immortal; so that when he deprived himself of that food, he was left to his natural weakness, which ended in death, and misery till death. And whoever deprives himself of this Bread of Life will be left to themselves, to the power of Satan, and to death eternal.

Do but lay to heart, how many tears it cost St. Peter for a crime so near a-kin to this, and you will not lightly turn your back upon this Sacrament; it being in effect saying, *I am not one of Jesus Christ's disciples.*

And now the Publick Service of the Church concludes with a *most solemn Blessing*, pronounced by the Priest of God.

That you may always dispose yourselves to receive *this Blessing* with devotion and advantage, I will shew you the certain blessed fruits of doing so. In the book of Numbers, [chap. vi. 22] there is a special charge given to the Priests, by God himself, to bless the people. There is a special form for doing it; and there is a special blessing promised to follow upon the Priest's blessing: *And I, faith God, will bless them.*

In Deut. x. 8, it is expressly said, that God separated the tribe of Levi, *to bless in his name.* And accordingly, 2 Chron. xxx. 27, we have the Priests blessing the people; and it is there added, "That their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to God's holy dwelling-place, even unto Heaven."

Had the blessing of the Priest under the Law such a good effect, and has not Jesus Christ given his Ministers as great a power? That would be to have very unworthy thoughts of the Gospel Ministry indeed: A ministry to which, St. Paul expressly tells us, God has in an especial manner committed the power of reconciling men to God.

I will set before you the devotion with which the people of God received the blessing of the Priest; a pattern not to be despised. It is in the fiftieth chapter of Ecclesiasticus, at the 20th and 21st verses, you read as follows: "When they had finished the service, then the Priest lifted up his hand over the whole congregation, to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips,—

\* 2 Cor. v. 18.

"and they bowed themselves down to worship, that they might receive a blessing from the Most High." And a blessing most certainly every Christian receives from the Most High, according as he is disposed for such a mercy; and as he has qualified himself by his devout behaviour in the service of God.

The Publick Service being ended, a serious Christian will not conclude that he has done all that is required of him. He will rather consider where he has been; what he has been doing; what he has heard; what he has prayed for. He will consider, that he has been at the House of God, where he has heard God speaking to him by his own Minister. He will give God thanks for the helps and means he has vouchsafed him of knowing his duty, and of performing it. He will call to mind what he has heard, and beg of God that he may profit by it; that he may live as he has been taught, and as a Christian ought to live. In short, he will not let the world take possession of his heart as soon as he comes out of the Church, but will endeavour to edify his soul by some such thoughts and short petitions as *these*:—

' I have been professing openly my faith in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to whom I was dedicated in baptism. I have been told by his own Minister, and out of his own Word, what my duty is; how I ought to walk so as to please God. I have been praying for such blessings as may make me happy while I live, and for such graces and virtues without which I shall be most miserable when I die. If I do not profit by these things, they will most surely rise up in judgment against me.

' To be so often told what will please and what will displease God, and not to mind it: To know that he is terrible in judgment, and not to fear him: To know that he is gracious and merciful, and not to love him: To be so often put in mind, that God sees all my actions, and not to be afraid to offend him: To pray so often, and so long for God's graces, without laying it to heart, that it must be my own fault if I do not obtain his grace and assistance to mend my life.

' What will this end in; if I pass one Lord's Day, one year, after another, without growing better by the many Sermons I hear; by the prayers offered so often to God for me; by the times appointed for the taking care of my soul? Is this the way of preparing for eternity,—for an eternity of happiness or misery? Shall I still continue to keep these thoughts out of my mind? Shall I shut my eyes, and not see the danger of being lost for ever? God forbid,



‘ forbid, (will every one say that has any grace) I will rather pray God to deliver me from hardness of heart, and contempt of his Word. And since he has promised to hear the petitions of such as ask in his Son’s name, I will, for his sake, beseech him to pardon my imperfections and indevotions. And I will endeavour, for the time to come, that my devotion and zeal shall be answerable to my wants. And

‘ then, I am sure, I shall return home with a blessing.’

I pray God we may all do so, as often as we meet here to worship God. And that our behaviour, when out of the Church, may be such as becomes the true disciples of Jesus Christ.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory.

## S E R M O N VII.

### THE TRUE REASON WHY PEOPLE DO NOT PROFIT BY SERMONS.

MAY I ever read and preach thy Word, O God, with the same spirit with which it was written. Give me, and all that shall hear me, a lively sense of the Almighty Power of a True Faith, to enable us to overcome all the Temptations of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil: And purify all our hearts by this Faith, that we may profit by thy Word, be converted and saved, through thy mercy in Jesus Christ. Amen.

H E B. iv. 2.

*The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.*

**A**MONGST the great number of Christians, who every Lord’s Day hear the Word of God read, explained, and preached; how many are there, who by their lives shew plainly that they do not profit, are not bettered, by it!

This is a melancholy consideration; and therefore it will be necessary that you should know, *what is the true reason why people do not profit by sermons.* We are told, in the words just read to you, THAT IT WAS FOR WANT OF FAITH.

God had promised the children of Israel the land of Canaan, for an inheritance for themselves and their posterity. They were told that they would meet with difficulties, and so they would not go forwards; that is, they would not take God’s word, that he would deliver them out of all the difficulties and dangers they should meet with. This highly displeased God; and, for a punishment of their unbelief, they were none of them who thus distrusted the promise of God, not one was suffered to set a foot in that good land.

Now this is the case of too many Christians. The blessed God would have all his creatures enjoy that happiness for which they were created. As matters now stand

with us, we cannot possibly be happy, till our natures are mended, and changed for the better. We foresee some difficulties in doing this; we will not give credit to the word and promise of God, that he will make us able to overcome all difficulties, and sufficiently reward us when we have done so.

What will this end in? Why; just as it did with the children of Israel. They never saw the land of Canaan, by reason of their unbelief. And, as sure as they did not enter into the promised Land, so sure shall not any Christian see the heavenly Canaan, *the kingdom of Heaven*, who will not attend to, and give credit to, God’s word, his promises, and threatenings, and order their lives accordingly.

Now; this word, and these promises, and threatenings, are read and preached every Lord’s Day. How then comes it to pass, that the generality of Christians are not bettered by it? The answer is the text just now read: “The word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”

You see, Christians, how much depends upon a true and saving faith—even no less than your eternal salvation or damnation.

It would be an high presumption for any Minister of Christ to say this, without authority

<sup>1</sup> See Deut. i. 32, &c.



thority from God's word. Hear then what our Lord Christ saith,<sup>s</sup> "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned:" that is, he that believeth the Gospel, which contains God's mercy to man, and man's duty to God, and is *baptized*, and promiseth and yieldeth sincere obedience to that Gospel; every such person, man or woman, shall certainly be saved. And as certainly, every one, man or woman, who *believeth not* that Gospel, which also containeth God's wrath against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men;<sup>h</sup> whoever receiveth not this Gospel, nor believeth it when preached to him, *shall be damned*.

Now, if these two concerning truths do not awaken every one who hears them, it must be for want of attending to them; or, in the words of the text, *for want of faith in them that bear them*.

But to awaken, and to cure us of this want of faith, this must be the work of thy grace, O blessed God! To Thee we must apply for grace to hear thy word with seriousness and attention; and for faith to profit by what we hear.

We are assured, that without faith it is impossible to please God. We are assured also, that a saving faith is the gift of God. And this gift and grace will not be denied to any one who begs it of God with a desire to be bettered by it. So that every one is without excuse, who does not hear the Word preached, and profit by it.

The Ministers of God are appointed by him, to read to you and to explain the Truths of the Gospel. To make Jesus Christ and his Gospel known unto men. To endeavour to convince them of the danger they are in without a Redeemer. To shew men what they must do to be saved. To beg of God to bless their instructions. To endeavour to awaken the consciences of the careless, and to make them feel, if possible, the diseases they labour under, and the wounds which sin hath made in their souls; that they may more cheerfully embrace the means which the mercy of God hath provided for their recovery.

For God is so wonderfully good and merciful to his unhappy creatures, as to promise, that he will pardon the greatest sinners who shall repent and return to their duty, and will make them happy for ever.

When these things are heard and not minded, as if people had no concern in them, no wonder they do not profit by our sermons:—for Conversion and Salvation are

not always the effect of sermons, but the grace of God accompanying them, and the disposition by which they are heard and received; namely, if they are heard with pleasure, attended to with seriousness, &c.

Now, to keep these merciful truths in your minds; to persuade you to attend to them; to give credit to them; not to ruin yourselves by not minding them: these are the end of all our sermons. And may God give his blessing to them, and to all that hear them with faith and attention!

In order to this, you must first know what that Faith is, the want of which is the occasion of people's *not profiting by Sermons*. Why; in few and plain words, Faith is the believing, the giving entire credit to, the truths which God has made known to us in his Holy Word. And this faith is to be attained by *bearing*, *attending to*, and *dwell-ing* upon, these truths; and begging of God so to open and set them upon our hearts, that we may not be easy, till, by God's grace, we live like people who sincerely do believe such truths.

Perhaps you will say, we *do believe* the truths of the Gospel. Pray have a care of deceiving yourselves. Remember the words of the Apostle,<sup>i</sup> *The very Devils believe and tremble*. They know every article of the Creed to be true, and this makes them tremble.

You will wonder, when I tell you, that there are men in one respect even worse than devils; they are such as know, and dare not deny, the truths of the Gospel, and yet *do not tremble*, nor are they afraid for themselves.

But you will perhaps ask—if the devils believe, why may not they be saved? Why; *their case is this*: they do indeed know, that every article of the Creed is true; but they are so hardened in sin and pride, that they will not ask God's *pardon*, his *grace*, and *help*, to restore them to his favour. And, whether people will believe it or not, *this is the case of all wicked men*, with this only difference, *that they are yet in a state of trial*; (which those evil spirits are past, and have lost) whereas the wickedest of men in this life are still in a *state of trial*, and in a possibility of being saved, if they can but humble themselves before God, *acknowledge their iniquities*, and *that they have transgressed against the Lord their God*;—if they will but beg of God, of his great mercy, and for his Son's sake, to *increase their faith*, to *awaken their consciences*, and to give them the graces they stand in need of,—with full purpose of heart of doing what they believe they ought to do. All such, though their sins be never so many and great, are yet in a state and way of salvation and happiness.

<sup>s</sup> Mark xvi. 15, 16.<sup>h</sup> Rom. i. 18.<sup>i</sup> James ii. 19.



By this you see, Christians, that there is something more necessary to salvation than *barely believing the truths of the Gospel*. These you may know, and believe, and yet be ruined for ever. Every serious Christian, therefore, will be desirous to know what more is necessary to make our belief a *saving faith*. And may God grant, that we may so explain this heavenly grace, that not one of us may have rest in his soul, till we obtain of God, (for faith is the gift of God) till we obtain such a faith as will enable us to profit by the truths of the Gospel, when proposed and explained to us by God's Ministers.

In order to this, you shall in the first place hear such truths as are proper to awaken men, and to convince them, *That the care of their souls ought to be the great concern of their whole lives*.

Such truths are these that follow:—

*First*; that all men are by nature in such a condition, as will certainly end in their everlasting misery, if they are left to themselves, and to their own desires and choices. For, being a race of sinful creatures, and prone to evil, an holy God cannot take pleasure in them to make them happy, until their corrupt nature be mended and changed for the better.

Now, God knows, that of ourselves we cannot do this, if we are left to ourselves and the weakness of our own corrupt nature and reason; he hath therefore, at the instance and for the merits of his own Son, promised to help us, to renew our corrupt nature, to pardon what is past, and to assist us for the time to come to become such as he can take pleasure in.

In order, therefore, to dispose us to close with this great goodness of God; to make us afraid for ourselves; to humble us; and let us see, and abhor ourselves, for having broken laws so holy, just, and good, and how liable we have made ourselves to his just indignation; God has given us numberless instances, in his Holy Word, of his dreadful displeasure against such persons and places as have broken his laws without fear, and without repentance;—that all sinners may see what they must expect in this or the next world, or in both.

God has also made known to us, that this is not the world we were made for; that we are here only in a state of trial, that our corrupt nature may be mended, and we made fit for a better life and state when we die. That if this is not done before we die, we shall be ruined for ever.

To prevent this, God, who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge and belief of the truth, has sent his only Son from Heaven, to let us know his love and pleasure, and what is necessary to our eternal happiness. And his blessed Son has assured us, that he has made our peace with God; that he will give us all the assistance we can want to make us acceptable to God; that God will make us happy for ever, if we shall strive to do our best to live as he has taught us; and that we shall be miserable, beyond what we can imagine, if we despise or neglect these offers of mercy.

These are truths made known to us in God's Word,—for the direction of our lives, for the confirmation of our faith, and for the trial of our obedience.

To fix these truths in your minds and memories is, or should be, the end of all our sermons. And our Lord has foretold us, that it is Satan who tempts men to neglect, or forget them, that he may ruin their souls.

People do not consider this power of the Devil over the hearts of those that do not fear God—nor are afraid for themselves. But pray hear what our Saviour saith: \* “The seed sown is the Word of God. If those that hear are careless, and not concerned for themselves, then cometh the Devil, and taketh the Word out of their hearts, that they may not believe and be saved.” So that you see, it is the great work of Satan to make you hear sermons and God's Word read to you with indifference: And that this is one of the *true reasons why people do not profit by sermons*.

\* Luke viii.

[Although this Sermon appears unfinished, yet the subject of it corresponding with the foregoing discourses, the Editor has thought it his duty to print it even in its unfinished state.]



## S E R M O N VIII.

THE MISERY OF NOT ATTENDING TO THE WORD AND  
MINISTERS OF GOD.

O Important Subject! Grant, O God, that I myself may see, and be able to teach others, the danger of living in any Known Sin; of being diverted from considering our latter end, by the cares, pleasures, or other idols of this world. Let this Truth be ever present with us—that we have but a short time to live, and an eternal interest depending; that we may not squander one moment of this short life in that which will not profit us in the day of necessity, and the hour of death. O let us never lose the sight of that important hour, for Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

PROV. V. 11, 12, 13.

*And thou mourn at the last, when thy Flesh and thy Body are consumed; [that is, when you come to die] and say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; and have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me?*

**T**HIS, good Christians, is what I would endeavour to prevent; that when you come to die, your consciences may not reproach you—for having not attended to the Word of God read or preached to you,—for having not obeyed the voice of your teachers,—for the great number of sermons, admonitions, and reproofs, that have been lost upon you,—for turning a deaf ear to those who were appointed to instruct you, and despising their reproof.

You hear, in the words just read to you, what a person, directed by the Spirit of God, assures you will be one of the great things that will torment and trouble you when you come to die, if you have led a careless and ungodly life. That you will most sadly lament your perverseness, your folly, and madness; and wish, with all your soul, that you had heard with patience the threatenings of the Gospel, and that you had taken the good advice of such as, out of pity to your souls, had forewarned you of the ruin you were bringing upon yourselves, by disregarding the Word of God, and the truths of the Gospel.

Believe it, Christians, this is the very beginning of sin and of ruin; when truths of the greatest concern to us are not minded; when the means of knowledge, of grace, of faith, and of salvation, are slighted.

Consider, that *Preaching* is an ordinance of God, and an ordinance on which depends, in some measure, the salvation of the world;

for how shall they hear, how shall they believe, without a preacher?<sup>m</sup>

This ordinance therefore neglected or despised, this sin continued in, how often does it provoke God to leave men to themselves,—to withdraw from them his graces and his Spirit? Upon which Satan takes them under his government, and then *must* follow sin and misery.

You will take notice, that this was the very case of Judas. How many concerning truths did he hear from his Lord and Master?—especially this one so often repeated, *Take heed and beware of Covetousness*. This was lost upon him, because he would not lay it to heart; and you all know what followed. The words of the text were most dreadfully fulfilled upon him; he mourned at the last, and left this world in despair.

Christians should consider, that this *may* be their own case, that it certainly *will* be so, if they hate to be informed and reproofed, if they obey not the voice of their teachers.

Now; the things which I would desire you to take notice of, as implied in the text, are these following: 1<sup>st</sup>; That all Christians, even the most knowing, will often want to be put in mind of their duty; to be taught, to be told of their faults, their infirmities, and backslidings. 2<sup>dly</sup>; That God has appointed certain persons, who, at the peril of their own souls, are to do this—to watch for

<sup>m</sup> Rom. x. 14.

<sup>1</sup> See Matth. x. 14. xiii. 3, 51. xxviii. 18, 19. Mark iv. 9. Luke x. 16. xi. 28. John xx. 21. Acts xiii. 48. xx. 28. Eph. x. 11. 1 John iv. 6.

your



*your souls as they that must give an account.*"

3dly; That such as neglect or despise this appointment of God, or the Ministers ordained for this purpose, will have reason to repent of it sadly when they come to die, and to consider what a life they have led, and what sins they have fallen into, for want of hearkening to the voice of their teachers.

These truths, one would hope, you do not want to be convinced of.

Every one for himself knows, how very apt we are to forget our duty, and the vows that are upon us, and to fall into sins which we have repented of; how often we want to be awakened into a sense of the danger we are in, and of the hope set before us.

Every body, who knows any thing of Christianity, knows likewise, that there are persons appointed by the Holy Ghost, as overseers, and to feed the flock of Christ; to teach, to reprove, to rebuke with all authority, to instruct such as oppose themselves, that they may recover them out of the snare of the Devil.

Lastly; every Christian, who is acquainted with the Gospel, must know the sad doom of such as *may* know the will of God, and will not hear or mind it, nor order their life accordingly: "That it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgment, than for such people," who do not consider, that when they despise the persons, the ministry, or the doctrine, of such as are ordained to instruct them, **THEY DESPISE NOT MAN, BUT GOD**: so saith St. Paul expressly, 1 Theff. iv. 8.

Taking it therefore for granted, that you believe the preaching of the Gospel to be one of those necessary means of salvation,—without which you would be either altogether ignorant of your duty, or soon forget it,—without which you would live and die in sin, and without hopes of mercy; taking this for granted, I will take some pains (and I hope it will not be lost) to convince you,

*First*; Of the infinite danger of living in any known sin, lest death should surprise and send us to a miserable eternity.

*Secondly*; That the way not to be surprised by death is, to have death much in our thoughts.

*Thirdly*; The great care we should take not to be diverted from the thoughts of death, by the cares, pleasures, or amusements of the world.

*Fourthly*; That when we come to die, we shall have very different thoughts of these idols of the world, than what we are apt to have at present.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. xiii. 17.

*Fifthly*; That the ill use and loss of our time, which cannot be recalled, will then be the most tormenting thought to those who now lead a careless and a sinful life.

*Lastly*; That, whatever they think of it, this will most surely be the fate and punishment of those who refuse to hear and obey the voice of their teachers.

I. In the first place, pray consider with me, *the infinite danger of living in any KNOWN SIN*. Now whoever does so lives in rebellion against his Maker, one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. He most ungratefully offends the best Father and Friend, the most indulgent Prince and Lawgiver, who commands his subjects no thing but what is absolutely necessary to make them happy; nor forbids them any thing but what would hurt and ruin them. You despise the patience and long-suffering of God, who can deprive you of life whenever he pleases, and continues you in life only that you may be converted and saved. You are in danger of provoking God to withhold his grace, without which you can never repent, never be saved. You, in effect, renounce being a subject of God, and chuse to be a slave to Satan. You are in the direct way to Atheism—even to wish there were no God to call you to an account.

This is the very condition of every one who lives in the practice of any *known sin*; or who, when he perceives that he has offended God, does not immediately repent of it, and resolve to do so no more. And whosoever shall be surprised by death in this state has nothing to expect but a miserable eternity.

II. This should convince us of *the great necessity and advantage of having the THOUGHTS OF DEATH much at heart*.

If Christians would but seriously consider, that the sentence of death is already passed upon them, (as it really is upon every one of us) they would be apt to think *now* just as they would do when that sentence comes to be put in execution. Why should I set my heart upon a world where I am to continue so very short a while, and where I am sure never to meet with true satisfaction? What if God, seeing me very intent upon the world, and setting up my rest here, should say unto me, as he has done to many others, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee?" What then will this unrighteous gain profit me? How bitter will the remembrance of these unlawful pleasures be to me? With what pain and grief shall I then part with these riches, these pleasures, these idols, which I am now so fond of?

Let me, therefore, beg of you to suppose you were now lying at the point of death.

Would



Would you, for the sake of leaving a better estate behind you, would you take advantage of that poor man's necessities;—of this poor man's ignorance? Would you recommend to your children the way of life you yourself have led? Would you not rather tell them,—multitude of business has ruined me; it has made me forget myself, my God, my duty to both, and the end of my being sent into the world.

Or if you have led a careless, useless, idle life, would you not charge your children, as they hope to be saved, *not to follow your example?* Would you not bid them, over and over again, remember the sentence passed upon the unprofitable servant, “Cast him into outer darkness.”

Or suppose yourself surprised by the approach of death in the midst of a life of pleasures, would you not tell your children how sad and bitter the remembrance of such a life is, when one comes to die? That you have, by leading such a life, lived in an utter forgetfulness of God; done little or no good in your generation; lost all the principles of a Christian life; so fixed your heart and soul on these vanities, that you cannot raise your thoughts to God, nor pray to him, in this time of distress, with any hopes of being heard?

Lastly; would not the most learned man, upon setting death before his eyes, confess the folly and impertinence of every study which does not tend to better our neighbour or ourselves, to glorify God, to mend the corruption of our nature, and to restore us to the image of God; which does not serve to furnish the understanding with heavenly wisdom, and the soul with devout affections?

In short, death will come, whether we think of it or not; the time, it is true, is uncertain; but this we are sure of, that the reason why the unfruitful tree was not immediately cut down was, that it might (if spared a little longer) bring forth fruit worthy of its place in the vineyard.

III. This shews *the great care we ought to take NOT TO BE DIVERTED FROM THE SIGHT OF DEATH, by a supine negligence, or by the business or pleasures of this world.*

Few people imagine, that they shall ever forget they must die; and yet how many live to find themselves deceived, and never think of preparing for death till they come within the sight of eternity? It is then indeed they will see their error; but who will assure them that it is not then too late? It is for this reason, our Lord has made it one of the express duties of Christianity, *to watch continually*, lest that day overtake us unawares; because so very much depends upon it. He

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has also forewarned us, in the parable of the seed sown among thorns, what are the things which will certainly divert us from the thoughts of what must come hereafter; assuring us, that an heart possessed with the love of *riches*, or filled with the *cares*, the *pleasures*, or *idols* of this world, is utterly incapable of entertaining any lasting thoughts of another life.

It is true, a form of religion and piety, and some serious thoughts and purposes, and even good works, may for a time subsist with a life of sensual pleasures, worldly amusements, and the love of riches; but at last, He, who knows what is in man, assures us, that these will choke every grain of good seed which his Spirit had sown in our hearts.

Let us therefore be persuaded, by all that is dear to us, not to lose the sight of death, by diversions which will signify nothing to us when we come to die, but only to torment us.

IV. For, *when we come to die, we shall have very different thoughts of all these idols of the world, than what we are apt to have at present.*

You have seen a child extremely fond of his play-things, and most impatient to part with them: an hour after, perhaps, he is taken ill, and you strive to divert him by the things he was just before so very fond of; but all in vain: the very sight of them offends him. Why now, as sure as we live, this will be the case of every soul of us, if we will set our hearts upon things which will not satisfy or comfort us when we come to die.

You are young, and you think a serious temper is not necessary. Depend upon it, you will not think so, if God shall visit you, and bring you within the sight of death. You will then see the folly and madness of a life spent in sin and vanity.

You are at present fond of what you call pleasant company; you will not believe it, that a time will come when you will cry out, would to God I had never seen these unhappy people who tempted me to an idle life, which made me forget myself, my God, and especially my latter end!

As for sensual pleasures, of every kind, it will be found true of them what the wise man said of wine, “At the last they will sting like a serpent, and bite like an adder.” Their wound will be mortal.

You lead a useless life; and you make your mind easy with such thoughts as these: I have enough to live on, and why should I trouble myself with labour and care? I will tell you why; for this reason, amongst others; because, when you come to die, such a scripture as this may come to torment your soul,—“Cast the unprofitable servant into

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“outer



"outer darkness, there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

To avoid this sentence, there are others so very intent upon the world, that they make a little religion serve their turn; nor will they give themselves time to hear, what their teachers would tell them, that *this* is not the world they were made for; and that they will have quite other thoughts of this world when they come in sight of that which is to come, and look back upon the little they have done towards preparing for a life which must never end.

V. It is then *the* ILL USE and LOSS OF TIME *will be the torment of their souls, who now lead a careless or a sinful life.*

Most people in health are apt, too apt, to flatter themselves that they have time enough before them; and that, as long as they live, their salvation will be in their own hands. This delusion has been the ruin of many a soul. "I say unto you, (saith our Lord) many shall seek to enter, and shall not be able." This is fair warning to such as will be making experiments, how long they may go on in a careless way of living, depending upon their own purposes, and the goodness and grace of God, whenever they shall think fit to ask for it; not considering that a time *may* come, that a time *will* come, when by a just judgment, they shall not be able to make one step towards their salvation, because they despised the long-suffering and goodness of God, which was designed to lead them to repentance.

Christians do not consider, as they should do, that we are in this life in a state of trial; that this trial is for eternity; and that as we behave ourselves well or ill in this life, it will be well or ill with us for ever.

He that lays this to heart, will never think his time a burthen,—will never seek for ways to get it off his hands,—will never imagine that he may spend it as he pleaseth,—will never live as if he had nothing to do.

Now; that you may set a true value upon the time which God allows us, in order to have our corrupt nature mended, and to fit us for heaven, do but represent to your minds one—who when he comes to die, and looking backwards, can see nothing that he has done but what must render him unworthy of the favour of God;—who has done little or no good in his generation;—who has done a great deal of evil, and has no longer time to repent of it, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance;—who has done wrong to his neighbour, and has no time to make restitution;—who is surprised in a course of sin, in the midst of worldly cares or pleasures, in an utter forgetfulness of God, and the duty he owes to him.

One cannot but tremble when we but suppose such a case as this, lest it should be your's, or mine, or any Christian's, when he comes to lie upon his death-bed.

And yet it *may* be so, and it really *will* be so, if we neglect the means of grace ordained by God to keep us from bringing this ruin upon ourselves.

VI. Particularly, *if Christians refuse or neglect to hear and to obey* THE VOICE OF THEIR TEACHERS.

Most people are apt to believe they know their duty as well as those that are ordained to instruct them. And the truth is, the duties of Christianity are so plain and reasonable, that the most unlearned need not perish in a Christian country for want of knowledge. How then comes it to pass, that so many Christians are in the certain way of perdition? The reason is plain; they do not attend and hearken to their teachers, with that seriousness they ought to do, who would ever and anon put them in remembrance of what *must* follow their disobedience.

People know their duty; but they are, the very best of men, but too apt to forget it. They believe the penalty—but are diverted, too often, from laying it to heart. Worldly cares and business, sensual pleasures, and other amusements, are the thorns mentioned by our Lord, which choak the word, and it becometh unfruitful.

Besides this, our corrupt nature is very unwilling to dwell upon such amazing subjects as must of necessity give great uneasiness to people's minds, who are engaged in any sinful way. They will avoid, they will shut out, the thoughts of death and judgment, if possible, out of their very memory.

And therefore our gracious Lord, who knows what is in man, and the terrible consequence of such obstinacy, has appointed his Ministers, who, at the peril of their own souls, shall ever and anon bring these things to your remembrance; and press you, as you value your souls, to dwell upon them; and as often as you forget them, so often to sound them in your ears, until, by the grace of God, you order your life accordingly, and bring forth fruit answerable to amendment of life.

And they that neglect to hear these truths from their teachers will most certainly mourn at the last, and say, "How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof;" when they come to see what their negligence has ended in.

How such negligence *does* end, the same inspired writer tells us in the following verses: they will be forced to confess, I WAS

ALMOST



ALMOST IN ALL EVIL. And the observation is certainly most just, *That the profanation of the Lord's day, and the neglect of the ordinances then administered, is the beginning of all evil*; and the greatest criminals have been forced to confess this at the last, when their eyes have been opened upon the sight of death and judgment, and what must follow.

And let no Christian, even the most knowing, be so conceited as to think he stands not in need of instruction from his teachers, after what the Apostle has declared, "That the preaching of the Gospel is the power of God unto the salvation of them that hear and believe." And "that it pleaseth God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." Intimating, that God has annexed the grace of conversion and salvation, in a great measure, to the preaching of the Gospel, to them who close with this ordinance, who esteem, and are sensibly affected with it, and endeavour and pray to be bettered by it.

And they that imagine that they know their duty, and need no teachers, will however stand in need of being put in mind both of their duty and danger, which the best of men are too apt to forget, and fall into the sins they have repented of.

And one most necessary grace they surely want, (who think they want not to be instructed) and that is, *the grace of humility*, the want of which (or else they understand little of their duty) will shut them out of heaven.

And now, good Christians, if you have attended to what has been said upon this subject, you will, I hope, be disposed to come to some such resolutions as these following:

"I will no longer flatter myself, that my time is in my own power; this short and uncertain time of life is my time of trial, of grace, and of fitting myself for heaven and happiness: how long it will last, God only knows, and therefore, through his grace, I will not let it slip and lose it. I will thank God for his patience in waiting so long for the fruits of his graces; and beg of him to enable me to bring forth such fruit as his mercy and goodness will accept of. And I will endeavour, by a sincere repentance and an holy life, to prevent the sad reproaches of an awakened conscience, when I shall have no more time to do any thing towards making my peace with God.

"It is not now a question amongst Christians, as it was amongst Heathens,—What will become of us when we die? Our Lord Christ came down from heaven to

let us know this, and that death infallibly sends us to a much better, or much worse place, than that we are now in. And, therefore, I will make it one part of my daily prayers, that God may not suffer me to forget my latter end, and what will follow. I see the advantage it would be to myself, and to the world, if we were often put in mind of this by those that are ordained to instruct us. It would teach us more than we are aware of; it would tie up our hands from *injustice* and *oppression*, and our hearts from *malice*, from every *evil thing*, from every *sinful pleasure*, which we shall then go to account for.

"I will, therefore, (will every serious Christian say) I will bless God for the pastors he has appointed to put us in remembrance of these things; and I will endeavour to profit by their instructions.

"I see plainly, that every thing conspires to make us lose the remembrance of the dangers that encompass us. The pleasures we are so fond of are only an art against thinking of death. The cares of the world, and the love of worldly things, are only a device of Satan to make us set up our rest here. Every vice we are fond of, every sin we commit, make us still more unwilling to think of death. What then would become of us, if it were nobody's duty to shew us whither our steps will certainly lead us? In one word, we should live, as we speak, by chance; we should never seriously consider what we came into the world for; what we are a doing; whither we are a going.

"I will not look upon the instructions of the Ministers of God, as the words of men, but—as they are indeed—grounded upon the Word of God, and, as such, I will hearken to them. And I will hope and depend upon it, his blessing will go along with them, if it is not my own fault. *They watch for our souls as they that must give an account.* What a mournful account will they have to give of those that will not hear their instructions? And what a mournful end will they make *who shall despise their reproof?*

"Horrible, (saith the wise man) horrible will be end of the unrighteous: They have no hope, no comfort, in the day of trial. But the righteous hath hope even in his death."

These are the thoughts which will support his departing soul:—

"I have obeyed the voice of my teachers, and inclined mine ear to them that instructed me; and their instructions have not been



'been in vain. They often put me in mind  
'of the thoughts I should have when I  
'should come to die; and these thoughts  
'made me more careful of my duty, and  
'kept me from a thousand evils. The re-  
'turn of every Lord's day brought along  
'with it its especial blessing; either some  
'advice, or some reproof, some duty I had  
'forgot, or some sin I had unwarily fallen  
'into. These I received as messages from  
'God, and ordered my life accordingly; and  
'now I have the comfort of doing so, when  
'I most stand in need of it.'

Who would not wish to make such an  
end? And surely it is in the power of every

soul of us, through the grace of God, to  
make such an end. Than which no sight  
upon earth is so charming, so desirable, as  
to see a dying man chearful, and a soul de-  
parting with comfort; with a certain pros-  
pect of a blessed resurrection.

O God! grant that this may be the case  
of myself, and of every one that hears me.  
That we may love, and attend to, the Word  
and Ministers of God. That we may live  
in the fear of God, and die in his favour,  
for the Lord Jesus' sake.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy  
Ghost, be all honour and glory.

## S E R M O N IX.

### THE SHAME AND DANGER OF BEING CHRISTIANS WITHOUT CHRISTIANITY.

E Z E K I E L xliii. 10.

*Thou Son of Man, shew the House to the House of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their  
Iniquities: and let them measure the Pattern.<sup>a</sup>*

**T**HE last eight chapters of Ezekiel have  
respect unto the state of the Gospel,  
and unto the New Jerusalem mentioned in  
the Revelations, as appears from the forty-  
seventh chapter, and from the name of the  
city JEHOVAH SHAMMAH; that is, God is  
there.

The Holy Spirit having very particularly  
described the Temple and its ordinances, at  
the tenth verse he commands the Prophet  
to shew that description to the House of  
Israel, that is, in a spiritual sense, to the  
Christian Church, *that they may measure, that  
is, take especial notice of, the pattern, and  
be ashamed of their iniquities.*

Now; whatever was written afore-time  
was written for our instruction, especially  
what was purposely designed for the use of  
the church of Christ. This then being by  
the Holy Ghost commanded as a very proper  
method of convincing people of their error,  
*to shew them the pattern they ought to imitate,*  
that they may be ashamed when they see with  
their own eyes how sadly they come short  
of it; I shall therefore follow this direction,  
as far as that Good Spirit shall enable me,  
and set before you,—first, *the pattern which  
Christians ought to follow; what they ought to*

*be. And then, secondly, the manner how they  
ought to imitate or follow this pattern.*

By which I would hope to convince such  
as have any degree of seriousness or concern  
for their souls, *that as far as they come short  
of this pattern, so far they will certainly come  
short of that happiness which God has promised  
his faithful servants.*

Now; in order to do this more effectually,  
we shall consider,

*First,* What is the great design of the  
Gospel:

*Secondly,* What means God has ordained  
for making that design effectual:

*Thirdly,* What is required on our part to-  
wards bringing this design about.

A plain account of these things will shew  
Christians to themselves. And when they  
see—how little they are affected with God's  
gracious design for their good,—how little  
they have complied with the means ordained  
for bringing it about,—and how very indif-  
ferently they have performed the duties re-  
quired of them; they may be ashamed of  
their iniquities, or be left without excuse.

<sup>a</sup> See Isaiah lviii. 1. Prov. xxx. 12. Tit. i. 16. Matth. xx. 16. Rom. ii. 28. ix. 6. Jer. vi. 16. Rev. ii. 5, 9.



I. And first; THE GREAT DESIGN OF THE GOSPEL is, in the Apostle's words, "to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."—That their eyes being enlightened with saving truth, they may see the wonderful goodness of God to mankind, in offering them *happiness* eternal upon the most favourable conditions;—that being made sensible of this, they may give glory to God, and shew forth his praise by fruits worthy of such a favour.

And truly, the favour was *so great*, that mankind would hardly have believed it, had not God sent his Son into the world, to assure them, that although they are sinners, and that as such he *cannot* take pleasure in them, yet that he is ready to be reconciled to all such as, being sensible and weary of their bad condition, are willing to accept deliverance upon the terms he has prescribed, and are content to be governed by such laws as *he* knows to be necessary to fit them for *that happiness* which he designs for them.

And, that they may not be at a loss to know—how *that happiness* is to be attained, what are the duties required of us, and how we may be able to perform them, God, by his Son, has given us a full and plain account of what is expected from us; upon what terms he will pardon us; and how we may be enabled to do what he requires of us.

To this end, he has appointed certain ordinances, to the serious observers of which he has promised his infallible blessing. He has also appointed an Order of Men, whose business it *shall be*, to teach and to explain these things; to exhort Christians not to neglect such offers of mercy; and to administer those ordinances, which he has appointed for enabling them to overcome all the difficulties they can possibly meet with.

And that men may not, at their peril, set light by these ordinances, and those that administer them,—because the ordinances are plain, and because they that administer them are men of like passions with themselves,—God hath expressly declared, that they that despise *them*, despise *Him*, for by *Him* they are sent; and that such as will not lay hold of the means of grace which he has ordained, must not expect his assistance in this life, or his favour in the next, but shall be punished for ever, for abusing so great goodness.

The truth of all which the Son of God sealed with his most precious blood; that men might not have any pretence to question the truth of these things, or to slight them.

And to awaken them into a sense of the hazard they run, if they should be so perverse as to despise that goodness which should lead them to repent, God has made known

to the world this concerning truth, *That he will call all men to an account*; "and that they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire." And that thus it will be, though all the world should be so stupid as not to believe or mind it.

*This* is the design of the Gospel;—*this* is the Christian's great concern;—*this* is his work.

Let us now consider, how this gracious design affects the generality of Christians.

One would expect, that when life and death are set before people, there would be no difficulty with them which they should chuse. That they would be very desirous to be informed what will be expected from them; and be very thankful to those whom God has appointed to inform them, and to be the Ministers of their reconciliation with God: And lastly, one would expect a general concern and seriousness, wherever these things are believed.

But, alas! the very contrary to all this is *matter of fact*. There are but few, in comparison, that give themselves the trouble of laying these things to heart at all. And, therefore, the generality of Christians have *no taste*, *no sense* of, *no value* for, the kindness and love of God, held forth to us in this dispensation.

It is true, all that live amongst Christians cannot but hear and *know something* of these things. But then the corrupt nature of man, which cannot bear to be restrained, strives to pervert the design of God and the Gospel according to the disposition in which it finds them.

They that are *atheistically disposed* think they see objections enough not to believe it. Of them that *do* believe and receive the Gospel, very many have only the *form of godliness*, but know nothing of the *power* thereof. Many *hold the truth in unrighteousness*; many run into sinful pleasures; others suffer the cares of the world to take up all their thoughts and time; while others, who yet think their time innocently spent, are engaged in studies which have no relation to the *one thing needful*. All these, however, are moved by the very same secret spring, namely, *the satisfaction men find in forgetting themselves* and the design of the Gospel, which is—to make us holy, that we may be happy.

And this is the reason, that the name of Christ, as the Apostle speaks, (that is, the Christian Religion) is blasphemed by unbelievers, because of the careless and bad lives of Christians,—of such Christians as are in danger of being shut out of heaven, for being as bad as infidels.

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But because we shall be better able to judge, *by coming to particulars*, how far we come short of our pattern, we will,

II. In the second place, take a view of *the means which God has ordained for making the design of the Gospel effectual for the salvation of mankind*. And these are, *the Ministry of the Word, and the Sacraments*.

And first; forasmuch as "without faith it is impossible to please God," God has therefore given us HIS HOLY WORD, as the most powerful means of begetting and increasing in us *that Faith* which will *save us*, by bringing us to the knowledge and belief of God, his attributes, and perfections. For instance: that he is *infinite in goodness*, and therefore to be *loved* above all things; that he is *infinitely just and powerful*, and therefore to be *feared*; that his word is *true* from everlasting, that therefore his promises may be depended on with the greatest confidence; that he is *merciful*, and that he is *severe*; *kind and merciful* to such as strive to please him, and *dreadfully severe* to such as despise his goodness and break his laws.

This is the *foundation of our faith*; this is the *mighty treasure* we enjoy; a blessing which the Heathen world are strangers to, and which even many Christians are deprived of. These are the *oracles, the statutes, and judgments* of God, "which shew us what is good; and "what the Lord our God requires of us;" which set before us the way of life, and the way of death; and "teach us what we must "do to be saved." "Which, being in truth "the Word of God, does effectually work "in them that believe." Having this advantage above all other writings, that such as read or hear them with an honest mind, and sincerely desire to do the will of God, *such shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God*.

In short, this is that book, of which the Spirit in the book of Revelations [ch. i. 3.] affirms, "Blessed is he that readeth, and "they that hear the words of this book, "and keep those things which are written "therein."

Having thus received of the Lord Jesus, "how we ought to walk and to please God," let us now see how we follow this pattern; what use we make of this mighty blessing.

And verily, there is such a plain opposition betwixt the rules of the Gospel and the lives of many Christians, that one cannot but fear that they make but very little use of God's Word, either for increasing their faith or governing their lives. And yet they say, they *believe* the Gospel, and that they *hope* to be saved.

\* Micah vi. 8.

This is a strange delusion indeed!—Can a man say with any truth, that he *believes* the Gospel, which gives a plain and positive account of the very different condition of good and bad men after death, which gives rules for Christians to walk by, upon the *observance or neglect* of which they are to be *happy or miserable* for ever: Will a man say that he *believes these things*, and yet live as unconcerned as if nothing were to be feared, nothing to be desired?

Now; to hinder this delusion from taking place, God has appointed an Order of Men, whom he has been pleased to call *his Ministers, his Ambassadors*; whom he has made *overseers* of his flock, and appointed them to *blest the people in his name*; to *exhort* and to *rebuke* gainsayers; and if they continue obstinate, to *reject* them.

These are their *powers*;—and their *duty* is, in Christ's stead, to exhort Christians, *that they receive not the grace of God in vain*, but that they walk worthy of him who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light, and to give them warning of the great hazard of *holding the truth in unrighteousness*: And to guard them against contempt, while they faithfully do their duty, Jesus Christ has declared, "that he that "despise them, despise God that sent "them." And has made it the mark of an Heathen for any man to set light by their censures.

And now, would not one expect that such persons should, as the Apostle commands, be *highly esteemed by Christians for their works' sake*, as well as for their master's sake?

I wish it might be said, with any truth, that the generality of Christians are truly sensible of the great blessing of a *regular standing ministry*. But the truth is, the wicked pains which too many take to defeat this gracious design of God for their good, and the too little regard for their administrations and godly admonitions, which others discover, should in all reason make Christians ashamed of their iniquities, and afraid of the consequence, namely, *the removing their candlestick*, that is, unchurching them.

The next merciful provision which God has made to preserve true religion amongst men is, *that of the Sabbath*. One day in seven is expressly commanded by God himself *to be kept holy*; that is, to be employed in hearing God's Word, in begging his pardon and blessing, in giving him thanks for his mercies, and in learning how to please him *here*, that we may be happy *hereafter*.

Let us now see how the generality of Christians observe this command of God—

\* Luke x. 16.

\* Matth. xviii. 17.

Remember



Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day. Why, truly, just as they do the rest of God's favours. Some make it a day of *idleness*; others of *sinful pleasures*; many go to church merely for *form's sake*, and many to avoid the imputation of having *no religion*; some will go only when they are in *humour*, when the *preacher* pleases them, when they have *nothing else* to do; and of those that *do go constantly*, how few seem to be truly affected with the blessed opportunity of approaching God! How few go with a sincere desire to be informed of their duty! How few behave themselves with the humility and reverence of people that know they are in the house of God; that acknowledge themselves to be miserable sinners, and know that they are for ever undone, if God does not pardon them! How few seem to be truly thankful for the mercies they have received, or truly sensible of the blessings they stand in need of!

And is it not for want of *thus* approaching God, with dispositions becoming *his* majesty, and *our* miserable condition, that too many return from God's house without a blessing; and very many, it is to be feared, without so much as asking a blessing?

Let us consider the other *means of grace*. We say, *the Sacraments are necessary to salvation*. Do the generality of Christians seem to believe them, in good earnest, to be so? Why truly, as to the first, Christians are generally very careful to have their children baptized; and very ready to promise for them, that those conditions which God requires of persons to be baptized, shall be observed when they come to age; and then they suppose, that they have done *their duty*, though they neither think of this promise themselves, nor take any great care that their children shall either know or perform it. Through which wretched carelessness of too many parents, it comes to pass, that they, who by baptism have been made the *children of God, and heirs of Heaven*, instead of continuing such, have become the children of the devil, and heirs of damnation.

We all know, that this is not the pattern set us in Sacred Scripture. I know, faith God of Abraham, that he will teach his children *to keep the way of the Lord*. And they that neglect to do so, will have reason to repent, when they find not *that comfort* in their children which they hoped for; and when their children will wish that they had never been born.

To prevent this, and to provide a remedy against the carelessness of too many parents, the Church has ordered, that as soon as children come to years of discretion, they shall be brought to be CONFIRMED; that is,

the Church will then be satisfied,—and *that from their own mouths*,—whether they know what a solemn vow, promise, and profession, was made in their name at their baptism; and whether they will ratify and confirm the same in their own persons? Which if they do sincerely, they become compleat members of the church of Christ, and have a right to all the blessings of being such; which are, the forgiveness of all their past sins; the manifold graces of God's holy Spirit; and an assurance of everlasting life and happiness, if they shall be careful to keep the vows they now take upon them.

And now, would not one expect to see all parents very thankful for such a blessed opportunity of having their children set out as they should do, so as living or dying to be a comfort to them? But, instead of this, instead of being solicitous to have their children duly prepared for this ordinance, too many parents are very little concerned whether their children are *instructed* or not; whether they are confirmed; nay, whether they are likely to be saved or damned. And those very parents, who would be in the greatest affliction to see their children made slaves for life, can yet be content to see them in danger of becoming slaves to hell to all eternity; which they are sure to be, if they are not instructed how to live so as to please God.

This is an occasion of grief to all serious Christians: And all Christians should be ashamed of such stupid carelessness.

The great end of Confirmation is, to *prepare young Christians for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*. That, as often as that Sacrament shall be administered, they may have an opportunity—of making their peace with God; of obtaining his pardon for any sins they have fallen into; of renewing their vows, and obtaining such further degrees of grace as are necessary for their present condition.

Here, if ever, one would expect to find all who profess christianity, very *serious* and very *sincere*; very *constant*, and very *devout*, at this Sacrament.

The command is plain and positive: *Do this in remembrance of me*; of ME, your Redeemer; of ME, who am going to lay down my life for you. The duty is easy to be *understood* by the meanest capacity; and easy to be *performed* by all that are willing to lead a godly life.

All Christians are bound, at the peril of their souls, to observe this ordinance of Christ. *The blessings* which attend the worthy receiving this Sacrament are invaluable,—no less than the pardon of all our past sins;



sins; the continuance of God's Holy Spirit; the increase of his graces here, and eternal happiness hereafter. And lastly, *the neglect or abuse* of this ordinance will be punished with judgments in this world, and in the world to come with misery unspeakable.

Notwithstanding all this, this ordinance is very much neglected, and much profaned by too many;—by too many, who would tremble to think of renouncing the Christian religion; who yet do in effect renounce the *Communion of Saints*, by turning their backs upon this ordinance. Not now to mention the strange indifference which too many discover, who come to the Lord's Supper; not considering, that it is as much the *food of their souls*, and as necessary for their spiritual growth, as *their daily bread* is for the support of their bodies.

And what do you think the consequence of this indifference will be? Why, assure yourselves, the very same with that mentioned by the Evangelist; "when the King came to see the guests, and saw there a man that had not on him a wedding garment; that is, one who professed to be a disciple of Christ, but yet behaved himself very unworthy of such a master; the King, therefore, ordered him first to be turned out of his house as an hypocrite, and then to be cast into *outer darkness*, where there is nothing but *weeping and gnashing of teeth*."

And now, good Christians, I have shewed you YOUR PATTERN. I have set before you the *design* of Christianity, and the *means* appointed by God himself for bringing *that design about*. That he has given us HIS *holy Word*, by which we come to the knowledge of Him and his glorious perfections,—that he is infinitely good, and therefore to be loved above all things; that he is infinitely just, and therefore at our peril not to be offended; that he is infinite in power, and therefore to be feared. By that Word also we come to know our own condition; that we are sadly fallen from that state in which we were created; that we are become the objects of God's anger, and of his compassion; that he is pleased to offer us pardon upon the most reasonable terms; and has given us all possible assurance, that if we make *this Word* the rule of our faith and manners, we shall be the care of his Holy Angels while we live, and be very happy when we die. That to bring this about, he calls us by his Ministers to repentance. By them, (that is, by baptism administered by them) we are admitted into his household, which is the church, by which we become his children, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven. That if we are so unhappy as to offend him after this, he will

\* *Matth. xxi. 12.*

notwithstanding be reconciled to us upon our pleading his Son's atonement, represented in the Sacrament of the *Lord's Supper*.

By all this, you see what God has done for us, and what more he will do for us, if it is not our own fault.

You have seen likewise, how the generality of Christians are affected with this love of God, and his tender concern for them. That it is too often with difficulty that they will be brought to consider these things with any seriousness. That they act as if they thought they did not stand in need of these *means of grace*; either altogether neglecting them, or using them with *indifference*.

To many, the *Lord's Day* is a burthen; prayer is discharged as if it were a *task*, and not a *privilege*. The Sacraments are used as common things; and as if no special blessings were annexed to them.

In short, you have been shewn, that too—too many content themselves with an *outward performance* of a few religious duties, without ever considering, that unless the heart be changed, all other shews of religion will never qualify a man for heaven and happiness.

And yet *Heaven and Happiness*, as faint as our belief of them is, and as unconcerned as the generality of Christians are about them, are what we all hope for,—I was going to say, *what we all make ourselves sure of*. Now, this is a matter in which, *if we deceive ourselves*, we are for ever undone.

To prevent this, as I have in part shewed you OUR PATTERN, and how far too many Christians come short of it; and therefore (if they be not ashamed, and mend) will come short of Heaven; so I would, before I conclude, put you in mind of a few truths, very proper to make us all more serious and concerned to be, what we all profess to be, *Christians indeed*.

The Apostle observed to the Jews, *that they were not all Israel, that were of Israel*. The carnal Jew expected God's favour, because he was of Abraham's seed, and of Abraham's religion. The carnal Christian has the same false hopes; he blesses God he is a Christian, and hopes for salvation without loving God, or parting with his sins.

Faith and obedience, therefore, must never be separated. A fruitless faith is of no more value than a fruitless tree; you all know the fate of it; "Cut it down, why *cumbereth it the ground?*"

To hope much, and do little, is too much the way of the world; but be assured of it, (good Christians) wherever there is a true faith, and a well-grounded hope, there will always



always be a proportionable concern to do what God has commanded. And wherever there is *such a concern*, and a *real desire* to do the will of God, there will always be a proportionable degree of *knowledge, grace, and assistance*, given by God; so that no Christian must ever say, that he cannot do the things which he is commanded.

And for our comfort we may remember, that *Christian perfection* does not consist in *having no failings*, but in *striving against them always*, and not suffering them to get the dominion over us.

And, because *humility* is a grace most acceptable to God, let this consideration be ever present with us, that if we really *did* do the things we are commanded, and as we *should do them*; we must, as our Lord bids us, say, *We are unprofitable servants*, we have but done that which is our duty; and if God shall think fit to give us any reward, it is of mere grace that he does so. So that when we *serve* God, let us remember that we *serve ourselves* much more.

And it is fit we should know, that although God has not *tied himself to ordinances*, yet he has bound us to the use of them; and that Christian will be sadly deceived, who shall expect *grace, or pardon, or assistance, or Heaven*, without a sincere observance of the *means of grace*.

But then, let us beware that we do not rest in a *form of religion*, without feeling the *power of religion*: for, most certainly, *imperfect conversions, a mere formal religion, a zeal for lesser duties, a forsaking of scandalous sins and indulging of others*, will in the end be found as hazardous as the most profligate life. A profligate sinner may be startled by God's judgment; but a sinner who

thinks himself safe, what *can* convince him? And indeed (as one very truly observes) those are not the greatest enemies to religion that are *most irreligious*;—a *formal Christian* may do more hurt than an *atheist*.

To conclude this discourse. The great end of religion is, *to restore us to the favour of God*, from which we are sadly fallen. If our religion does *not* do this; if it does not make us *more humble, more fearful of offending* God, more concerned to do what we know will please him, more *holy, just, and charitable*, than we are by nature; *we had as good to have no religion*.

THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF. *This is our Law and our Pattern*; this is what every Christian is to aim at; and God will proportion every Christian's reward, according as he shall sincerely strive to come up to this rule.

That we may all strive to do so; let us seriously consider the great importance of those words of Christ, *MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN*; that is, many profess Christianity, but, of those many, few will be saved, because they do not live up to the rules of the Gospel: *This, if any thing, will make us serious*.

And may God, who has blessed us with a knowledge of our duty, and the happiness we are capable of, and with sufficient means of attaining it; may He *put his fear into our hearts*, and suffer us not to content ourselves with *bare shadows of religion*, without endeavouring after that *holiness without which no man must see the Lord*.

Grant this, O God, for Jesus Christ's sake.



## S E R M O N X.

THE SHAME AND DANGER OF BEING CHRISTIANS  
WITHOUT CHRISTIANITY.

E Z E K I E L xliii. 10.

*Thou Son of Man, shew the House to the House of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their Iniquities, and let them measure the Pattern.<sup>a</sup>*

**I** MADE choice of these words, in order to oblige Christians to reflect upon their own conduct, and the danger *they* are in who lead a life contrary to what they believe and profess.

I was sure it was a most proper method, because the Spirit of God directed the Prophet to do the same;—*to shew the House of Israel their pattern, that they might measure it, that is, take particular notice of it, and be ashamed, when they should see with their own eyes how sadly they came short of it.*

I considered also what an effect the like method had upon King David, when, forgetting himself and his God, he had taken the wife of Uriah; and how truly he judged, that that rich man deserved no mercy, who had so barbarously taken away a poor man's only lamb for his use, when he had enough of his own; and lastly, how bitterly the King repented of his sin, when the Prophet made him sensible, *that this was his own case.*

The way I took in my former discourse on these words, to convince Christians of *the shame and danger of being Christians without Christianity*, and that as far as they come short of their pattern, so far they will most certainly come short of that happiness which God has promised his faithful servants, was this:—I first shewed, that the *great design of the Gospel* was, to make men holy, that they might be *capable* of being happy. Then I explained the means which God has appointed to bring that design about: such are, his Word and Sacraments, his Ministers, and his Sabbaths. After this, I shewed—how little the generality of Christians are affected with this gracious design of God for their good,—how little they esteem it,—and how indifferently they comply with the means ordained by God for bringing that design about. This I did, to awaken Christians into a sense of the danger they are in, if they

should continue to despise so great means of salvation.

The next thing I proposed was, to set before you, in one short view, your pattern, *with respect to the things required on our part to fit us for Heaven and Happiness.* And this is what I purpose, by God's blessing, to do at this time.

Now; the things required on our part are, FAITH and REPENTANCE. To believe in God, and to keep his commandments, is what every Christian promises when he is baptized.

We will first consider, *what it is which we profess to believe.* We profess to believe of God, that he is infinite in *power*;—that we depend on him for life and breath, and all things;—that he *knows* and *sees* every thing that is done;—that he is perfectly *holy*, and cannot but be displeased with every thing that is wicked or unjust;—that he is infinitely *just*, in punishing such as abuse his goodness; for his goodness is such, that he cannot command any thing which is not absolutely necessary for the happiness of his creatures: And lastly, that he is most *faithful* and *true*, and will make good all his promises.

Now; the duties which should follow from the knowledge and belief of these things, are these: That we should *fear* this great God; that we should fear to offend him above all things;—that we should *love* him with all our heart, forasmuch as all the blessings we enjoy, or hope for, are the effect of his goodness;—that we should keep his commandments, it being our interest as well as duty to do so;—that we should be thankful for his favours, never murmur at what he orders for us,—depend upon his word and promises,—and honour and reverence every thing that belongs to him.

<sup>a</sup> See Ps. i. 21. Ezek. xx. 4. xxix. 2. Matth. vii. 14. John xiii. 15. Phil. i. 27. 1 Thess. ii. 12. 1 John i. 6, &c. viii. 12. Jer. vii. 9.



If our faith in God has not these effects, it is surely not such as it should be. For *to believe* is to be persuaded of the truth of the thing we believe.

But can it be said with any truth, that Christians do generally live as if they were really persuaded of the truth of those things which yet they profess to believe? For if men are not at all afraid of offending God, and of breaking his laws, it cannot be said, that they are convinced that God will punish sinners, and that he sees all their ways.

Will Christians, who live at all adventures without fear and without concern, say, that they verily believe, and are persuaded, that joys unspeakable will be the portion of good men, and that unutterable miseries will be the lot of the wicked?

Will a man say, that he loves God with all his soul, whose conscience tells him, that he loves many things better; that he seldom thinks of God, and that he takes little care to please him?

Shall we pretend to say, *that we put our whole trust in God*, when we seldom ask for his guidance and blessing; when we value not his promises, nor are careful to perform the conditions on which all his promises are made?

How do we express our dependance upon God, when we are not careful to pray to him for what we want, and forget to give him thanks for the mercies we every day receive from him?

With what assurance will a man say, *that he fears him who can destroy both body and soul in hell*, who will act against his conscience for the fear of man, or to avoid any worldly inconvenience?

Lastly; will any man say, that he honours God, who upon every occasion takes his name in vain,—who sets no value upon his Word or Ordinances,—who despises his Ministers and his Sabbaths?

These things are so inconsistent with what we profess to believe of God, that Christians only want to reflect a very little, and to compare their doings with their pattern, to fill them with shame and confusion.

And so it would, in the next place, if they would but consider what they profess to believe concerning JESUS CHRIST, and the way of salvation *by him* made known to us.

We acknowledge him to be the Son of God;—that God sent him to make his will known to us;—that he taught us, both by his word and example, how to live and to please God. He knew that we could never be happy till we were restored to the favour

of God, which we never could be, till we should be restored to his image. In order to this, he proposes to us—the forgiveness of all our sins, upon our sincere repentance,—the assistance of God's holy Spirit, to renew what is amiss in us,—and eternal happiness after death.

To convince us of the *evil of sin*, and to make us abhor and flee from it, he assures us, that sinners will have their portion with devils, if they do not make their peace with God by a timely repentance.

To prevail with God to accept of their repentance, he laid down his life for us; (for no less a sacrifice would be accepted) and that we might not be for ever miserable.

To convince us more effectually, by his own example, of what moment these things are to us, and of what little value this world is in comparison of that which is to come, HE, the Lord of all things, made choice of a life of *poverty, humility, afflictions, resignation, and self-denial*; renouncing all those pleasures and advantages, which the world values, and is fond of.

And lastly; that he might make his precepts and example effectual to our salvation, he receives us into his family, instructs us by his Ministers, guides us by his Spirit, protects us by his Angels, and is our Mediator with God for all the blessings we want and pray for.

And now let us consider, what are the consequences of this tender concern of our Saviour for us? What are the effects of our belief of these things? Shall we say, that the generality of Christians do make the life of Christ their pattern; and are verily persuaded, that all his doctrines are most true; that his precepts are most necessary to fit us for Heaven; his promises of grace and assistance upon our sincere prayers, and of pardon upon our repentance, to be entirely depended upon; and lastly, his account of a judgment to come, of the joys of Heaven, and of the torments of hell, most certain?

Would to God we could say, with truth, that Christians are generally convinced of these things, and that they live accordingly. But how can we say so, when we see too—too many very indifferent whether these things are true or not; and most of all, who acknowledge them *to be true*, and yet will not be persuaded to live as they *know* and *believe* they ought to do?

To instance in some particulars: We believe that Jesus Christ “has brought life and “immortality to light through the Gospel;” that is, He has made known to us the certainty of a future and an eternal state after



death. Now this should, in all reason, oblige Christians to consider things *as they have respect to eternity*. But is this the fruit of our faith? On the contrary, we live as if this were to be our everlasting home;—we desire to set up our rest here;—and we seldom think of, seldom provide for, a life to come.

Are Christians persuaded, that as soon as they die, they shall go to a place either of happiness or misery, according as they have lived in this world? If they *do* believe this, it is certain they do not often think of it. And yet Jesus Christ assures us, it will be so; and that a Christian ought to part with any thing, as *dear to him as a right hand or a right eye*, rather than provoke God to send him to hell.

Then, for the example he has set us, we know with what a small share of the world he was satisfied, though all nature was at his command. We hear him every where exhorting, and even requiring, his followers—to take up the cross, to deny themselves, to mortify their corrupt affections,—as ever they hope to be happy hereafter. If there are any of his followers, who never think they have enough of this world; who aim at nothing so much as to be easy, to meet with no crosses, to have whatever their hearts desire; who will not deny themselves any satisfaction; it will not sure be said, that such Christians take Jesus Christ for their pattern, or that He will ever own them for his followers.

It is upon the account of the great things our Saviour has done for us, that the Apostle says, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha,” that is, accursed when the Lord comes to judgment. How do Christians shew that they love him? I will tell you how they should satisfy themselves in this; that they do love him sincerely. If they love his humility, his patience, his self-denial, and strive to imitate them; if they hate that sin, which for our sake cost him his life; lastly, if they desire to know what will please him, and, when they know the things which he has commanded, do endeavour to do them; then they have that very testimony of their love, which Jesus Christ requires; all others being nothing but delusion.

To conclude this particular, Christians profess to *live by faith*. They should know, in the first place, that *faith* is the *gift of God*, and to be prayed for. If they neglect to do this, and to put themselves into a capacity of receiving the grace of God, they must not wonder if God denies them his grace.

A Christian may know certainly whether he lives by faith or not. If he lives as in

the presence of God, fearful of offending him, concerned to please him; when the promises and threats of the Gospel affect us; when the fear of hell hinders us from following forbidden pleasures; when the hopes of Heaven keep us from doating upon the appearances of happiness we meet with here; when the *belief of a judgment to come* makes us watchful over our thoughts, designs, words, and actions: In one word, when we govern ourselves by the rules of the Gospel, it is then we *live by faith*, and shall most certainly obtain the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.

We shall now consider Christians in the ordinary duties of life, and see how they follow their *rule*, their *pattern*, with respect to the commands of God; that if we find a too general departure from the rules set us to walk by, we may consider what it will end in.

Now Christians are represented in Sacred Scripture, as *a people called from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*; who having renounced the *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil*, are no longer subject to them, but are *holy* in their lives, *just* in their dealings, and *charitable* to one another; who keep a careful watch over themselves, and against their spiritual enemies; praying continually for grace to *withstand them*; having their eye always upon the prize of their high calling, the joy set before them; dreading, at the same time, the dismal consequences of miscarrying.

It is impossible to consider this account of Christianity with any sort of seriousness, without making very melancholy reflections, with respect both to ourselves and others.

When one sees many Christians as ignorant of God and of their duty as the very Heathens, who are still in darkness and under the power of Satan: When one sees Christians as careless, as indifferent, and as secure, as if there were nothing to be feared, nothing to be hoped for: When one sees Christians praying for the pardon of their sins, for grace to amend their lives, for deliverance from eternal misery, and for the joys of Heaven, with the indifference of people that are not concerned to be heard: When one sees them as fond of the world, as if they had vowed never to forsake it; as if God designed, as if God could give them no better inheritance: When one considers these things, one cannot but say, that such Christians forget their pattern, and that they are in the way to ruin.

To be a little more particular; and to begin with the duties we owe to our neighbour: Would a stranger to our religion imagine, that Christians had any such a command as this;



this; *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thyself*; when he should see it every day violated in a thousand instances? And would he not be astonished, when he should be assured, that this is one of those two commands, upon the keeping of which their eternal salvation does depend? When he should see Christians, who profess to believe this, so far from being *just*, (for instance) that they must often be *compelled* to give every man what is his due, and must be hindered, by a superior power, from doing hurt to their neighbour;—who make no conscience of doing wrong,—of using deceit and fraud,—of taking advantage of the ignorance and necessities of others,—of injuring their neighbours by false witness, by spreading reports, and passing judgments, which are contrary to truth and charity. And lastly, who, when they have done wrong, or given offence, refuse to make restitution, though they know for certain their repentance will never be accepted without such satisfaction and amends. Christians know very well that all these things are contrary to that love which they owe to their neighbour; that it is doing to others what they would not have done to themselves; and that it is at the peril of their souls when they do them.

If Christians have too often so little regard to *justice*, shall we suppose that they will have a greater regard to that *charity*, which by the laws of the Gospel is due to their neighbour;—that they will *forgive*, and *give*, and *love*, as becomes the disciples of Jesus Christ? And yet no less than the salvation of our souls depends upon this. “He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy,” saith the Apostle. And our Lord hath expressly declared, that at the day of judgment, such as have had no compassion for their poor brethren shall have no favour from God.

If we descend to particular duties, we shall find them as much neglected, as if God had given no commands concerning them.

We shall find, for instance, too many children regardless of the authority of their parents, disposing of themselves as if they were their own masters, refusing to be corrected, hating to be advised; and too many parents utterly unconcerned for the good education of their children in the fear of God.

We shall find subjects obedient, not out of conscience, but for fear of punishment; defrauding the publick, speaking evil of dignities; as well as too many in authority, who discover a very little zeal for the glory of God, (whose Ministers they are) when they punish the sins against men with much greater severity than those against God.

We shall find pastors and their instructions despised, and the authority of Jesus Christ rejected in the persons of his Ministers; and these also forgetting the end of their calling, to watch over the flock, to instruct, to reprove, and to pray for them.

We shall find husbands and wives as careless of their marriage vows, as if God, who was called to witness when they made them, was not able to punish them for their perjury.

Lastly, we shall find Christian servants unfaithful to their masters; and these again forgetting that they have a master in heaven.

Now, they that are thus regardless of their duty, and feel *no uneasiness*, *no stings of conscience*; they must be very ignorant, or given up to A REPROBATE MIND.

Let us, in the last place, consider the duties we owe to *ourselves*, and see whether we discharge these any better than those we owe to our neighbour. Now, the first and great duty which we owe to ourselves is, *to take care of our souls*. Christians would not hear a man with patience, who should say, that people need not mind their salvation; and yet, if we must speak the truth, we *must* say, that the generality of Christians do not take any care of their souls; that is, they do not mind those rules which are absolutely necessary to fit them for heaven and happiness.

For, let me ask again, are the generality of Christians to be known from infidels by their *self-denial*, *patience*, *humility*, *purity*, and *charity*? And yet, without these graces and virtues, no man *can* be happy. “If any man will come after me, (saith our Saviour) let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Is this no longer a Christian duty?

The intent of our blessed Lord in this command is, to wean our affections from this world, and to subdue them, that God may take possession of our souls, and by his Holy Spirit fit them for eternal happiness. And, therefore, all those Christians, which are too plainly the greatest number, who give way to their inclinations, who follow not what is most pleasing to God, but to corrupt nature, are, without any doubt, in the way of perdition.

Where is that *resignation to the Will of God*, which reason as well as religion has made our duty? We pray, indeed, THAT GOD’S WILL MAY BE DONE; but we are angry when it is done, and in effect charge him with injustice, when he would punish us in this life, that he may not be obliged to do it in the next; or when he would prevent or cure a disorder, which if not done would infallibly ruin us.



The promise of SEEING GOD is made to THE PURE AND CLEAN OF HEART, and to these only. What then must become of that infinite number of people, whose hearts are full of all impurity; who entertain such thoughts as defile the soul, and make it utterly unfit for the Spirit of God to be there? Must we not say, that all such are excluded from the promise of seeing God? And, if an impure heart will shut us out of heaven, impure actions will make us fit for no place but hell.

We may shut our eyes and our ears against such affrighting truths; but as sure as God has made his will known to us, this will be the issue of such a life: "No unclean person shall have any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God; but shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

Lastly; what shall we say of those many Christians, who lead an idle and a useless life; or of those who are indeed industrious, but it is only to be more rich, that they may be more miserable? Do such people consider, that they are Christians,—that they have an interest to secure, on which their ALL depends,—and that it is in this life their lot is determined either for heaven or for hell.

You will say, perhaps, that Christians know all this; but then it must be acknowledged, that they that *do* know these things, and yet live as if they did not believe them, that their condemnation and judgment will be most severe as well as just.

To prevent this, I have set before *you* and *myself*, our pattern; I have shewed you how very little the generality of Christians do mind it: And this I have done, not to expose the weakness and corruption of human nature, but to awaken us all into a serious sense of the bad condition of those who live without God in the world: And that every one of us, seeing how sadly we come short of our pattern, may be ashamed, and afraid too, lest our repentance and amendment should come too late. And lastly, that such Christians as have made the life and the doctrine of Christ their pattern, may by this representation have the comfort of seeing that they are not of the number of those unhappy people, who content themselves with the bare name of Christians, with mere shadows of religion and piety, without endeavouring after that holiness without which no man shall see the Lord.

And now, you see plainly, that to be a Christian, and a *true* Christian, are two very different things.

A TRUE CHRISTIAN sets his pattern before his eyes; and, because his salvation depends on it, he resolves to make it the rule

of his life. He studies therefore the *truths* and the *duties* of the Gospel; prefers the light he meets with there to all others: He resolves, that what the Gospel declares, *that* he will believe, let what will be said against it; that what it recommends, he will follow *that*, and avoid what it forbids. If, upon examining his conscience, he finds that he does any thing contrary to what the Gospel prescribes, he is ashamed and sorry for it; begs God's pardon, and his grace to observe it better for the time to come; watches over his inclinations, avoiding every temptation that may lead him to sin; never consulting the world, its *authority*, its *customs*, or its *frowns*, for what he ought to do, or what to avoid. And by doing this he secures the favour of God, his grace here, and eternal happiness hereafter.

On the other hand, those Christians who live, *as too many do*, in a general forgetfulness of God; taking no care of their souls; contenting themselves with some outward formalities, and bare shadows of religion, without feeling its power; who make the world their pattern, notwithstanding the caution Jesus Christ has given us not to follow its ways and maxims. Such people, under the name of Christians, are very heathens, will be rejected of God, and are reserved for a punishment dreadful to be named.

Christians must not, to excuse themselves, say, that they cannot come up to their pattern, to be what the Gospel requires them to be. It is no less than blasphemy to say so. For God's grace is sufficient; his grace may be had for asking; and he requires no more of us than what (upon our sincere prayers and endeavours) he will enable us to perform.

To conclude: God has given us a *Law*, by which he will judge us; by this law we are to judge what our condition is like to be hereafter, whether happy or miserable. That we may make this judgment more impartially, let us consider what our thoughts will be when we come to die. Whether, for instance, we shall not be in the utmost confusion, when, our life and pattern being set before us, it shall appear that we have lived in a plain contempt, or neglect at least, of what we professed to believe, what we knew to be our duty, and what we were often put in mind would be the consequence of neglecting it? Or whether we shall then have the comfort of having compared our life with our pattern, seen our errors, made our peace with God by a timely repentance, and lived to bring forth fruit answerable to amendment of life?

One of these two will be the case of myself, and of every one here present; how soon,



soon, we know not; but it highly concerns us to be prepared for it, and that forthwith, *lest the night come, when no man can work.*

To this end let us retire, and beg of God, who has given us our pattern, and who alone can enable us to follow it, to put his fear

into our hearts, to give us the grace of repentance, to sanctify us both in body and soul, "that we may be meet to be partakers of an inheritance with the saints in light;" which God grant we may all be, for Jesus Christ's sake.

## S E R M O N XI.

SEPTUAGESIMA. SEXAGESIMA. QUINQUAGESIMA. LENT.

FEAR AND CARE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN OUR WAY TO HEAVEN.

FILL my Soul, O Lord, with a salutary Dread of the Unfaithfulness of my own Heart; and, while I am labouring for the Salvation of Others, give me Grace to fear for Myself. Amen.

I P E T E R i. 17.

*Pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.\**

THESE words are a serious admonition to all Christians. I hope, therefore, you will hear them explained with great attention. The plain meaning of them is this:—Forasmuch as your eternal happiness or misery will depend upon your behaviour in this life, it concerns you, as much as your souls are worth, to live with great CARE AND FEAR, lest, when you die, you should be miserable for ever.

Care and concern (for that is the meaning of *fear* in this place) are necessary even in our worldly affairs, if we would not let them go to ruin. But Christians must be strangely careless, fearless, and unthoughtful, who profess to believe a judgment to come, and yet are unconcerned what sentence their works shall deserve, what sentence God in justice *must* pass upon them.

And yet all Christians, who are not careful of their lives, who are not fearful of offending God, are in this desperate condition. They are going headlong to certain ruin,—to a ruin that never can be remedied; and yet are fearless and unconcerned.

The *Duty* therefore, good Christians, which I would explain to you at this time, and which I would charge upon you and upon myself, as ever we hope for heaven and happiness, is this; *to preserve ourselves, as much as possibly we can, and at all times, in a serious temper.* This being what the

Apostle means, when he exhorts Christians "to pass the time of their sojourning here in fear;" when he bids us in another place,<sup>2</sup> "be sober, be vigilant." The same which St. Paul advises Christians,<sup>3</sup> "to work out their salvation with fear and trembling;" that is, with a concern answerable to the great work they have to do, and to the loss they are like to suffer, if it be not done. This also is what the same Apostle<sup>b</sup> intimates in these words: "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall:" that is, let no man be too secure of himself, lest he fall when he least thinks of it. This is what the Wise Man means by saying,<sup>c</sup> "happy is the man that feareth always;" and that "he is truly a wise man, who feareth and departeth from evil."<sup>d</sup> This is also what the Psalmist speaks in other words,<sup>e</sup> "stand in awe, and sin not;" intimating, that our great security lies in an AWFUL FEAR of offending God. And lastly, this is the meaning of the warning so often repeated by our blessed Lord; to be always upon our *guard*, to *watch*, to be *sober*, to *fear him* who can destroy both body and soul.

Thus you see the Holy Spirit, in these and in many more places of Sacred Scripture, lays down this for a certain truth, and a truth of the greatest moment, being so often repeated, that *fear, and a serious care and concern, are absolutely necessary in our way to Heaven.* And that they who have no

<sup>1</sup> See Ps. ii. 11. xxxix. 1. Luke xii. 37. xvii. 28. <sup>2</sup> Pet. i. 10. <sup>3</sup> 2 Cor. v. 11. vii. 1. <sup>1</sup> Theff. v. 6. Eph. v. 15.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. v. 8. <sup>a</sup> Phil. ii. 12. <sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. x. 12. <sup>c</sup> Prov. xxviii. 14. <sup>d</sup> Prov. xiv. 16. <sup>e</sup> Ps. iv. 4.



concern upon their spirits, and lay little to heart, are in the sure way to ruin.

But that you may not misunderstand these Scriptures, or imagine that the *fear* and *concern* here recommended consist in a *sourness of temper*, or a *dejected spirit*; or that this fear must necessarily be attended with *MELANCHOLY*, *sadness of mind*, and a *life of sorrow*; I must tell you, that it is so far from this, that there is nothing more chearful; no cure for melancholy so certain, as a religious fear and concern to please God.

For this fear arises from an awful regard for the commands of a God, infinitely *holy*, *just*, and *powerful*; who is yet so good as to pardon those that return to him in the sincerity of their heart, and will be careful and desirous to please him.

This fear consists in a concern for having offended so gracious a father, with a serious resolution of doing so no more. It is a fear of falling into the common vices of the world, attended with a sober purpose of keeping out of the way of temptations. It consists in a just sense of our own weakness and infirmities, with a full confidence in God's gracious assistance, when we ask it in sincerity.

In short; the fear here spoken of, and in which we ought to pass our whole lives, is a serious concern for our eternal welfare,—a care lest Satan get an advantage over us,—a dread of provoking God, and of forfeiting that grace on which our salvation depends.

And *this fear* is formed in our hearts, by considering seriously the greatness and majesty of God, the holiness of his laws, the great happiness we are capable of, and the extreme misery we are liable to if we should miscarry. By considering the *enemies* we have to deal with, the *temptations* we are sure to meet with, the *corruption* and *inconstancy* of our own nature, and the many sad instances before our eyes, of men ruining themselves to all intents and purposes, for want of *thought*, and *fear*, and *care*, for what must become of them when they die.

A man can hardly think of these things with seriousness, but he must have *some fear*, *some concern* for himself.

Now if this concern disposeth him to hear and receive the truth; if it restrains him from evil, and makes him desirous to please God; why then a man answers the purpose of God, in putting his fear into his heart; and this fear will be of use to him in every circumstance of life, and become a means both of *obtaining* and *securing* the favour of God.

Christians therefore have great reason, as ever they hope for the favour of God, to beware how they oppose, or strive to stifle

or divert, a *serious temper of mind*, and a *salutary fear for themselves*. For, in the first place, it is THAT VERY FRAME OF SPIRIT which God makes use of in order to bring us into the way of Salvation.

By this, he represents to our minds things of the greatest concern to us; and, as it were, forces us to consider them. He sets before us, on one hand, *eternal happiness*, as possible to be attained by due care, and yet as possible to be lost by negligence and a sinful security. On the other hand, having filled our hearts with godly fear, he represents eternal misery as the certain portion of wicked men, of careless and unthoughtful people.

It is to minds full of this godly fear, that he shews men to themselves, and makes them see their sad and sinful state, their weakness and inconstancy; that they may see a necessity of fleeing to God for help, or the danger of continuing in a condition which must end in ruin.

“They that be whole (saith our Saviour) need not a physician, but they that are sick:” that is, such as consider their own ailments, and are afraid for themselves, will look out for help, while such as are under no concern sit still, and are in danger of being lost.

People are apt to think, that because they know their duty or their danger, they can easily perform the one and avoid the other whenever they please; but it generally happens, that both duty and danger are neglected until God awakens the soul into a sense of her misery. And God makes use of this passion of fear, to make all his other gifts and graces effectual for our salvation.

Thus the Apostle observes,<sup>b</sup> “that Noah, moved with fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his house;” intimating, that his faith, great as it was, stood in need of *fear* to quicken it, to make him do what God had commanded him, to save himself from perishing with the rest of the world.

Let us add to this, that this religious fear is what makes us fit objects of God's grace and compassion. So saith the Spirit expressly,<sup>c</sup> “To this man will I look, even to him that trembleth at my word.” And our Lord, by inviting such as are “weary and heavy laden;” such whose misery has made them concerned and serious, “to come unto him;” intimates thus much, that “these shall find rest unto their souls,” because *these* only are prepared to receive it.

Lastly; it is this salutary fear, which makes the duties of christianity less frightful and

<sup>b</sup> Heb. xi. 7.

<sup>c</sup> If. lxvi. 2.



burthensome. To break off evil habits; to deny one's self many things which we are but too fond of; to mortify the flesh, and our sinful affections; to take up the cross; these are duties which would most certainly discourage a Christian, if God, by putting his fear into our hearts, did not convince us of the necessity of doing any thing to escape the wrath to come. For then, let repentance and the difficulties of a new life be never so irksome, a man who considers any thing will choose them rather than continue under the displeasure of an angry God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

And this consideration (if we resist not the Spirit of God) is often forced upon us, to let us see what a careless and fearless life is like to end in.

And here one cannot but wonder at those, who, forgetting this only sure argument of conviction, endeavour to persuade men to forsake their evil ways upon the account of the unreasonableness of them, and the worldly inconveniences that attend them.

Alas! our corrupt hearts will not be effectually changed by all that ever can be said upon the worldly inconveniences that will attend our continuing in sin; and few men but will get over all such reasons when tempted to sin.

But who is so hardy as to slight eternal misery, and hell fire, when he shall be convinced that these will be the certain reward of an evil life?

And indeed we have of ourselves so little inclination to lay things to heart, that if God had not set before us the terrors of the world to come, and did not fill our hearts with fears of future evils, not one man in ten thousand would make the least step towards being reconciled to God.

But God has mercifully provided a remedy for this weakness and corruption of our nature, by making known to us the certain miserable portion of wicked men in the life which is to come. And this God has done, in order to awaken us; to make us serious; to make the pleasures of this world less palatable and bewitching; to break the force of temptations; and to convince us that the difficulties of a religious life are to be chosen before everlasting burnings.

And very happy is that man, whose fears and thoughtfulness have had this blessed effect upon him—to bring him from the power of Satan unto God.

But even then we must not lay our fear aside. "Let him (saith the Apostle<sup>a</sup>) that thinketh he standeth," and that he standeth out of danger, "take heed lest he fall;" for

he is yet within the reach of temptations; and that very fear and seriousness of mind, which brought him into the way of life, will ever be necessary to keep and to confirm him in it. This being the best disposition by which we may most effectually secure the grace of God. So saith the Psalmist: "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart, and saveth such as are of a contrite spirit."

*He is nigh unto them*, to bring to their remembrance their former iniquities; to shew them the sad dangers they have escaped, and the sad condition they had been in, had not he vouchsafed them the grace of repentance, and cured them of that sinful security which is the ruin of an infinite number of souls.

*He is nigh unto such*, to make them mindful of their infirmities and of their backslidings, that they may be more importunate for grace for the time to come; that they may *watch*, and be *sober*, and keep the heart with all diligence; which are duties so difficult, that nothing but the presence of God can enable them to go through.

Besides all this; this serious temper is generally attended with a *tenderness of conscience*, a blessing which we should very highly value, if we would but consider its advantages.

A temptation may be sudden. A man may not always have time to weigh the evil tendency of an action; he may not always know what his duty requires of him; but if his conscience is tender, he will abstain from all appearance of evil. He will likewise keep a faithful watch over himself, lest by giving way to the least known sin, he soon fall into a much greater.

Such a man will call to mind the torments of a guilty conscience, the difficulties of a true repentance, the danger of being given over to a reprobate mind; and these fearful considerations will serve—instead of *time* to consider, instead of *friends* to advise with, instead of *knowledge* to direct, in time of temptation.

Add to all this, that a *serious temper*, a *thoughtful heart*, will contribute very much to make us *devout*; without which, no man must hope to be saved.

If a man fears God's displeasure, he will often supplicate his mercy. The fear of offending God will put us upon asking his grace upon every occasion;—the fear of our enemies will force us to beg of God his help and protection;—and the fear of being ungrateful will mind us of our duty, to be thankful for every favour we every moment receive. This is to live in dependance upon God, which is the great end of religion, and

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. x. 12.<sup>a</sup> Ps. xxxiv. 18.



will preserve a true peace of mind and conscience, without which no man can be happy.

A man may indeed lay his conscience asleep; may resolve to see no danger, nor believe that his condition is deplorable; and by this means he may enjoy a false peace of mind. A man may reject such thoughts as are most proper to awaken him into a sense of his misery, or he may silence his conscience. But peace of conscience must have its beginning from a fear of God, and a firm faith in his word.

God has proposed terms on which he will be reconciled unto us: These terms we receive, and solemnly promise to observe them. We meet with difficulties; this makes us more diligent. Sometimes we fall or go astray; this makes us more careful. When God sees us doing our best, he pities and forgives us. This makes us still more desirous to please him; serious in praying for assistance; avoiding all temptations which may draw us from his service; always fearing, as the Apostle advises,<sup>1</sup> "Lest a promise being made us of entering into his rest, we should come short of it."

So that the more fearful a Christian is for himself, and of offending God, the more assurance he has of being in God's favour, and the greater peace of conscience: So faith the Spirit expressly of the first Christians;<sup>2</sup> "They walked in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost."

Directly contrary to this, are the fruits of *security*, and of a *careless life*: for these are, Negligence; bold venturing upon temptations; a wicked life; and a reprobate mind: enough, one would think, to awaken the most drowsy sinner.

And now, good Christians, you see how absolutely necessary the Apostle's direction was, "That we should pass the time of our sojourning here (our whole life) in fear;" that is, with a concern suitable to what we are like to lose and suffer, if we do not do so. Might not one expect, therefore, to see Christians, who know all this, very *thoughtful* and *inquisitive* about the way of salvation;—taking heed to their ways;—abstaining from all appearance of evil;—always preserving themselves in a serious and devout temper of mind?

Why truly one might expect this: But experience, sad experience, shews the contrary; and that Christians, the generality of Christians, do live as if there were no manner of danger, nothing to be feared;—as if nobody had ever miscarried;—as if fear and circumspection, and a serious temper, had never been enjoined us; but that we should

all be happy, all go to Heaven when we die, without ever concerning ourselves how we live.

But be assured of it, Christians, that *sobriety*, *watchfulness*, a *fear of offending God*, are duties as necessary to our salvation, as our daily bread is to keep us alive. Necessary, I say, at all times, for all conditions of life, to people of all ages, in all affairs, in all employments, in all our dealings with men, in all our approaches to God, in prosperity, in poverty, and even in the common actions of life. In all these circumstances and conditions, Christians are obliged to live with *fear* and *caution*, as they hope for Heaven.

They that are *young*, if they are not brought up in the fear of God, will contract evil habits before they are aware, which may stick to them as long as they live, and carry them to hell when they die. And if they that are *old* have been destitute of this grace, and neglect to labour and to pray for it with all their might, they must soon perish undoubtedly.

If the *rich* have not the fear of God, and a very great share of grace, their riches will be a snare and a curse to them, and will be a means of shutting them out of heaven. And even the *poor*, who have so many promises, and so favourable a title to the kingdom of heaven, if they want this grace, will be apt to grow impatient, and will endeavour to better their condition by unjust ways.

Indeed; we shall have perpetual occasion for this grace, and a serious temper.

In our *devotions*; that we may not mock God, and draw near to him with our mouths when our hearts are far from him. That when we go to church without reverence, and godly fear, we may know for certain that we return home without his blessing.

If we want this grace, we shall be tempted, in our dealings with others, to *oppress*, to *defraud*, to *over-reach* our brother, not remembering "that the Lord is the avenger of all such."

Who would expose himself to any inconveniencies, any temporal loss, to the displeasure of men,—who would deny himself any pleasures,—who would not enrich himself at the cost of his neighbour,—if the fear of God did not restrain men?

And therefore we say very justly, when we see men do such things, that they have not the fear of God in their hearts. We say so, and see it in others: Would to God we could always see it in ourselves.

In short, as we stand in need, every moment, of God's grace and protection, it behoves us to be every moment in a disposition to

<sup>1</sup> Heb. iv. 1.<sup>2</sup> Acts ix. 31.



to ask and to receive his grace; that is, to be ever serious and thoughtful. For, as the Devil never leaves off to tempt us, so must we never leave off to watch against his temptations and snares.

I know what the generality of Christians will be apt to think of all this. Why all this ado? Our lives will be a burthen, if we must be always upon our guard, always afraid of falling.

Be persuaded, good Christians, to believe the quite contrary. The fear of God makes men neither *sad*, nor *sour*, nor *melancholy*, nor *dejected*. And if the Wise Man may be trusted, his advice is,<sup>a</sup> "Be thou in the fear of God all the day long; for the heart of the righteous is a continual feast."

And whoever hopes to make his life easy by casting away care, and flinging off the fear of God, will infallibly find this effect; either he must severely pay for it by a bitter repentance, or he must resolve to perish eternally.

A Christian who believes this will not sure say, that it is hard for one to be always serious and mindful of their latter end; much less to say, that he is ashamed *to be singular*. For that in truth is to say, 'I am ashamed of getting from among a crowd of people, who I know are in the very way to destruction.'

After all; it is not so easy to possess our hearts with this concern, with this godly fear, as it is easy to advise to it. It will be necessary, therefore, to lay before you a few very important considerations, proper to possess our hearts with a salutary fear for ourselves.

We should stand amazed to hear a man say, *that he feared not God*, nor what God could do to him; but pray, where is the difference betwixt the case of such a man, and one who has no concern upon him how he may please God, or how he may escape his anger.

Some men's lives are so profligately wicked, that they leave no room even for charity to have any hopes of their salvation. They think neither of heaven nor of hell, and their condition is looked upon by every body to be truly deplorable.

At the same time, there are Christians, who through multitude of worldly business, or who having nothing to do but to divert themselves, or pass their lives in pleasures, do think as little to any saving purpose of a live to come, as the other; and yet these are hardly believed to be in danger.

Men must have a strange opinion of religion, when they imagine that there needs little or no care to perform what God re-

quires of us. Would we but consider, that our sojourning here on earth is in order to purify our souls, and make us fit for heaven when we die, we should sure think that something more will be required of *us* than of the beasts that perish, and that this will require some care and serious endeavours.

Had we but the courage to ask ourselves a few such questions as these following, we should see plainly the mistake of those who promise themselves heaven, without taking care and pains to fit themselves for it:—

What was I sent into the world for? What have I been doing ever since I came into it? I profess to believe, that when I die, I shall be either happy or miserable, and that this will depend upon my behaviour here. Has my behaviour been regulated according to the rules set me by God, who is to reward me?

As soon as I came to know myself, and my own nature, I found it extremely corrupt: Have I taken pains to mend it? I came into a very corrupt world: Have I been afraid for myself, and of being made worse by its evil example? I found myself weak, and subject to fall: Did I continually implore the Divine assistance, whose assistance was promised me, when I should beg it sincerely?

God has promised to pardon sinners upon their repentance; but has my repentance been followed by amendment of life?

I am assured, that whoever is truly sensible of the mercy and goodness of God, cannot choose but love him with all the heart. Have I been careful to call to mind the instances of his goodness to me? Have I taken pains to conquer that perverseness of my nature, which is unwilling to forgive others, though my own pardon depends upon it?

A few such questions as these will awaken a man into a sense of his danger, if his life has not been a state of care and concern for his everlasting welfare.

In short; Heaven and Happiness is what every soul of us depends on; and we should *any of us* be filled with unspeakable horror, if we had not hopes of being saved when we die.

—Let us have the patience but to ask this short question,—Why do I hope for salvation? If I have indeed thought of it with seriousness, if I have laboured for it with diligence, if I have been afraid of miscarriage, if I have duly prayed for God's assistance, and have closed with the means of salvation which he has ordained; why then I may hope for salvation from a merciful God. But to hope for happiness without doing any thing to obtain it, is the hope of madmen,

or

<sup>a</sup> Prov. xxiii. 17.



or of hypocrites, whose sentence has already been passed: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness."—"Cut down the unfruitful tree; why cumbereth it the ground?"

Let then every Christian who hopes for happiness consider, What the conditions are on which God has promised his servants eternal happiness;—how many have been ruined for not performing these conditions. Then let him consider what the Spirit of God hath declared, "that broad is the way, and wide is the gate, that leadeth to destruction;" and what if it should be my sad lot to be one of those many that go in thereat?

Have I no reason to fear miscarrying? Have I no enemies to be afraid of? Has the world no longer any snares, no temptations? Is Satan no longer "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;" finding them off their guard, and from under God's protection? Why then are we so often warned, to fear; to be sober; to be upon our watch continually? Have we no examples of people given up to work all iniquity with greediness?

But, you will say, you have thought of these things. And have you, therefore, no longer reason to be afraid? Are Christians no longer subject to backslidings? Does not every man's heart witness against him, that he has often, very often, broke his resolutions? And is there no fear of doing so again?

But God, you say, is infinitely merciful: indeed he is so, or else no man would have been saved.

But let us Christians consider, that God is true as well as good; and he will be merciful to us according to the terms he has set down in his Holy Word. They that will not submit to these terms must inevitably feel the effects of his severe justice; or else, to what purpose is the book of God filled with judgments threatened, and judgments executed, upon impenitent sinners, but to give those that survive just impressions and reasons for fear?

And then, if we add to these reasons the manifold transgressions of our whole lives, the punishment of which is only suspended on condition that we repent and persevere;—if we set before our eyes the holiness of that religion which we profess; the Majesty of God, to whose eyes all things are naked and open, who requires of his servants a sincere endeavour after holiness, and whose anger is to be dreaded more than death;—when we consider, that our lives are not in our own power, and that, within a very few years, we shall every soul of us be in another world: Verily, whoever dare think of these things,

and are not concerned and fearful for themselves; they must be such, who, as the Prophet speaks,<sup>1</sup> "have made a covenant with death;" that is, who fear no evil, no judgments.

But Christians, who have any concern for themselves, will see their danger, and will prostrate themselves before God, and pray him to put and preserve his fear in their hearts; and to give them all that seriousness, care, and concern, that is necessary to keep them awake, and mindful of what must come hereafter.

These duties may indeed discourage ignorant people, and such as have no care for their souls; for such people look only on the difficulties of a regular life, but know nothing of the happiness of such a life. For example:—They do not see what *snares*, *dangers*, and *troubles*, a Christian escapes, who is careful of his ways, and is for that reason under the direction of a good Providence. They do not feel with what peace that Christian lieth down at night, who hath feared and shunned every evil of the day past; nor with what comfort he riseth in the morning, who is resolved, by the grace of God, to walk circumspectly that whole day. Nor, lastly, will careless people believe, with what peace that man will give up the ghost, who so orders his life, that when his Lord cometh he may be found watching.

All serious people understand, that there is great recompence in such blessings as these for all their care; and for such as are not yet become serious, the best service one can do such is to pray with the Psalmist,<sup>2</sup> "Put them in fear, O Lord, that they may know themselves to be but men;" that they may see their great danger before it be too late to prevent it.

After all, some unfortunate people will be apt to think, that their fears are too great already; and that they rather want advice to lessen them. And indeed it must not be denied, but that fear may exceed its just bounds, and even hinder our serving God as we ought to do. Our great enemy aiming at two things; either to make us careless and fearless, which is a state of perdition, as you have already heard; or else to plunge men into despair of obtaining pardon, of overcoming the corruption of their nature, or of pleasing God by any thing that they can do.

And Satan very often takes advantage of the disorders of the body, to heighten such people's fears, as far as God shall permit him, towards despair.

But they that fear God, their comfort is, that they are in the hands of God, and that

<sup>1</sup> If. xxviii. 15.<sup>2</sup> Ps. ix. 20.



no power on earth or hell can touch them any farther than God judges it shall be for their eternal advantage.

And this should keep them from impatience, from repining at God's dealings with them, from charging him foolishly; and make them more importunate for grace to secure them (as far as God thinks fit) from both these extremes,—from a *sinful security*, and from *causeless fear*; that they may serve him “acceptably with reverence and godly “fear.”

There is another fear which we are far from recommending, and that is, a *slavish fear*; such as wicked people, until their consciences are seared, do always labour under—a fear of the vengeance of God for the wickedness they are not willing to forsake.

But this *slavish fear* is easily known from that religious fear recommended in the text. A slave looks for no favour when he has done amiss; he hates the master he fears; he is obedient only for fear of punishment, and has no concern but to hide his faults. On the contrary, a child of God is afraid indeed when he has done amiss; but he remembers, that *he* is a *father* whom he has offended, and with an humble confidence hopes for his pardon, and loves him the more because he is so good as to forgive him.

You see by this time, my Christian brethren, what I have aimed at; namely, to recommend to you a *serious temper*, which is the true Christian frame of mind and spirit. That this consists in loving God, and fearing to offend him, and lastly, in resolving to amend wherever we are sensible we have done amiss.

I consider that the approaching season [LENT] is observed by all serious Christians with a more than ordinary regard for religious duties.

Many, it is to be hoped, will call themselves to an account for the errors of their lives past, and make sober resolutions of amendment for the time to come.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 28.

Such as are sensible that they have transgressed through intemperance, have a good occasion offered them of taking revenge upon themselves by mortification and self-denial; for mispending their time, by retirement; and for neglect of duty, by resolving upon, and setting about the duties of their proper calling, with more care and diligence.

Such as have been at variance will take this occasion of labouring to be reconciled, and to forgive, as they hope for forgiveness themselves at God's hands.

They that are engaged in a sinful way of living of any kind should consider, that this may be the last opportunity offered them by God, of beginning a repentance not to be repented of.

In short; we should all take this occasion of considering, (and this the most ignorant can do, as well as the most learned) That we have not long to sojourn here;—that death is ever at hand, and to be surprised would be the most dreadful thing in the world, for that we shall rise out of the grave just as we lie down in it, either the objects of God's wrath, or of his mercy to all eternity;—that therefore we should at all times endeavour to preserve ourselves in a serious temper of mind, and avoid every thing that may make us forget that we have souls capable of the extremest misery if not taken care of;—that we are sure to be most happy when we die, if we are careful to please God while we live; and

Lastly, that whenever we suffer ourselves to grow *unthoughtful, indifferent, and careless*, we are in greater danger than we are aware of, of hardening ourselves against all motives and means of salvation, the fear of hell, and the hopes of heaven.

I beseech you therefore, brethren, let it be seen, by the seriousness of our lives, that we hope to go to heaven when we die.

Which God grant, for Jesus Christ's sake, our most blessed Lord and Saviour.



## S E R M O N XII.

THE CHARACTERS OF A FAITHFUL SERVANT CONSIDERED, AND APPLIED,  
(for our Direction and Comfort) AS WE ARE THE SERVANTS OF GOD.

MATTHEW XXV. 20, 21.

—He that had received five talents, came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained besides them five talents more. His Lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

THE more thoughtful people are, the more apt are they to be cast down with the remembrance of their *imperfections* and *failings*; while they that are less careful of their ways are apt to run into *another* extreme, and *hope well for themselves*, not always with good reason.

Now all this proceeds from people's having *wrong apprehensions of God*. And there is no way so likely to free our minds from *false hopes* on one hand, and on the other from *unreasonable fears*, as this: To consider well *the way of speaking* which our blessed Saviour has made use of in the Gospel, to convey to us *just and worthy notions of God*, and the relation we bear to him.

For instance:—Sometimes he calls God *Our Father*, to assure, and shew us, with what goodness and compassion he will treat us, if we behave ourselves like dutiful children. Sometimes he is called a *Judge*, to imprint upon our minds, what an impartial sentence we must expect from *his justice*. Sometimes he is called a *King*, to shew us the authority he has over us; and that, as a mighty Prince, he has power to punish his rebellious subjects, who will not return to their duty and obedience. And to mention no more, God is *here* represented as our *Lord* and *Master*, to put us in mind of the work we have to do, the account we are to give, and the reward we may expect if we continue his faithful servants unto our lives end.

Now, as the Spirit of God has thought fit to make use of such expressions as these, *so well understood by all sorts of people*, we may certainly conclude, that he will deal with us accordingly; namely, As a *wise and good Father* would deal with his children, with great tenderness and affection, while they do their best to please him. As a *prudent Prince* would govern his subjects, with mildness, or severity, as they are good or otherwise.

And lastly, as a just and bountiful Master; not requiring of his servants more than they are able to perform, bearing with their mistakes where they are not wilful, and making good all his promises, when they shall have done their work.

And it is for want of having *these characters of God* before their eyes, that people very often entertain *wild or unjust thoughts of Him and his ways*; make their lives uncomfortable, and their religion a burthen, by entertaining themselves with *unreasonable fears*, while they should be *endeavouring to do their duty* in that state of life unto which the providence of God has called them, which will be found to be the best assurance any man *can* have, that he is a *servant of God*, that he is in the *way of salvation*, and that if he continues in *this way* he shall be approved of God, and admitted into heaven at the last.

Now, the relation betwixt *masters and servants* being easy to be understood, and God being pleased to express, *by such a relation*, his purpose of dealing with us hereafter, I chuse these words, in order to explain and settle in our hearts a true notion of *faithfulness or sincerity*, that we may have the comfort of knowing when we are *safe*, and that we may *not be secure and easy* when we really are *not so*.

And first, the words may imply thus much: That as *servants to the great Lord of the world*, we must all give an account of *the talents which he has given us*. This consideration will be apt to make us serious, and concerned for the *issue of such an account*.

Then what follows is expressly contained in the text; namely, 1st, *The approbation of God*; “well done thou good and faithful servant:” 2dly, the *reason* of such approbation; “thou hast been faithful:” 3dly, the *reward* of being so: “Enter thou into the  
“ joy



"joy of thy Lord." From which necessarily follows *this truth*;—That every man who is faithful to husband the talents which God has given him; or, in other words, who shall do his duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call him, shall certainly be saved.

But then this question very naturally comes into our minds: How shall I know that I am one of those faithful servants to whom such rewards will be given? How may I hope that God will accept of my service; especially when my own heart tells me, that I *have* done, and am *subject* to do, many things amiss? Why, pray, how does a *well-meaning servant* know when he may expect his master's *pardon, approbation, and favour*? Does he not consider what are the *characters* of a *good and faithful servant*? And if he is conscious to himself that he acts like such a one, is he not easy and satisfied; and does he not, with some assurance, depend upon what has been promised him as a reward of his labours?

To come then to the main design of this discourse. Let us consider what are the characters of a *faithful servant with respect to men*; and then let us see how we may apply these characters, *as we are the servants of God, for our direction and comfort*.

Now if a man enters into service, with a full purpose of observing all his master's just commands; if he truly performs what he promises, and what he is put in trust with, and honestly employs his time and abilities for the honour and advantage of his master; if he patiently submits to be reprov'd; or, upon calling himself to an account, mends where he has done amiss; we count such a person a *good servant*; and should be ready to conclude, *that master* unreasonable who would not be pleased with and reward his service. On the contrary, a *wise and good master* will make great allowances for failings which are unavoidable; he knows that the most *faithful servant* may *mistake*, may be often at a loss what to do for the best, may not always be able to do what he knows he ought to do.

In all these, and many more instances of failings, which do not proceed from *carelessness, from contempt of authority, or from a wilful contracted laziness*; but rather from *weakness, surprize, or other infirmity*, to which all men are more or less subject; in all such cases, a good man treats his servant with compassion and forgiveness.

And will not THE LORD OF ALL THE EARTH be as *just, as kind, and merciful*, as any of his creatures? And may we not be as easy and as secure from fear of an angry resentment in *his*, as in the most indulgent

service? Yes sure, provided we do indeed deserve the character of *good and faithful servants*, having *his pleasure and honour* most at heart; and desiring to approve ourselves to him in every thing we do. It is not consistent with *infinite mercy*, that such should finally miscarry; and we may very safely conclude, that whatever is truly *reasonable, or just, or kind*, amongst men, *all this* will be found, and much more than can be expressed, in God's dealings with us.

But to be more particular, and to apply this to the service we owe to our GREAT LORD AND MASTER. Whoever would approve himself to be *his faithful servant*, and have a title to the reward of being so, must lay himself under these following obligations, which will be a *sure test* of his *faithfulness or sincerity*, and consequently a *sure foundation of peace*.

*First*; He must resolve to obey God in all things, to the best of his understanding and power.

*Secondly*; He must employ his gifts and graces for the honour of his Lord and Master, in the discharge of such duties as his state of life obliges him to.

*Lastly*; He must call himself often to an account, whether he does so or not, and make use of the means of grace in order to know and to do his duty.

To keep to these rules will secure a man in the favour of God; and to fail notoriously in any one of these will occasion *endless scruples* in a mind fearful of what may come hereafter, and greatly hazard one's salvation; as will appear, now we come to consider the *importance and the consequences* of observing or neglecting them.

I. And first; a *resolution of obeying God, to the best of our understanding and power*, is both *reasonable and necessary*. It is *reasonable*, on account of God's authority over us; of the assurance we have, that all his commands are just, and for our good; and because of the reward we may hope for from such an obedience. It is *necessary*, both to lay a bias upon the will, to enlighten the understanding, and to keep the mind in perfect peace.

It will lay a *bias upon the will*, which is of greater consequence than is usually imagined; for certainly it is a great matter to be determined before-hand, that no consideration whatever shall prevail with me to do disservice to or to displease God, *if I know it*. For then I have no other dispute with myself, when I come to act, but this:—Is this the *will of God*? Is this an action worthy of one who pretends to be his devoted servant? Is this consistent with the vows that are upon me, and with my hopes of heaven?

And



And this has been the way of good men, and *their security*: “I have sworn, and am purposed, to keep thy righteous judgments,” saith the Psalmist: that is, I am determined at all times *what to do; to do the will of my Lord and Master, when I know it*, without consulting my own will, my passions, or worldly interest.

But for a man, when a temptation lies in his way, to be at liberty to wish that God had not forbidden him the thing he desires;—to question whether the penalty of breaking his laws will be greater than the pleasure of following his own inclinations;—to be at liberty to hope that the *goodness* of God may perhaps pardon, where his *justice* has so severely threatened: *This would be a fatal liberty*. It would be parlying with our corrupt appetites, which are often too strong even for our most settled resolutions; much more when we are undetermined what to do until we are forced to act; when the present *pleasure, or profit, or passion*, will too likely prevail with us to forget the rewards or punishments of a future life.

Such a resolution is necessary, on account of the *peace of mind, and security from fear of evil*, it gives us.

*Sincerity* consists in an inclination and readiness of mind *to learn and to do the will of God*. Wherever this is found, there may be *mistakes*, there may be *failings*, there may be *sins of infirmity*, but there cannot possibly be such a *perverseness of the will*, or a *corruption of manners*, as will exclude us the service of God, or forbid us hoping for his *pardon, favour, and blessing*, provided we chuse not ways of serving him of our own devising, but make use of, and value, *the means of grace* which his wisdom and goodness has appointed for our instruction, assistance, and salvation.

Lastly; such a resolution and readiness to do the will of God, will be a powerful means of understanding at all times *what the will of our Lord is*. “He that will do the will of God,” (saith our Saviour) that is, he who desires to do it, “he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.”

The truth appears to men just as they are disposed to receive it; and it is not always for want of reason, that men do not believe or know the truth, but generally from an unwillingness to receive and to obey it.—“Hearing ye shall hear and not understand,” saith our Saviour: And yet this was *their condemnation*, which could not have been unless the will of God had been plainly made known to them. And it was *their crime* as well as *their punishment*, that *pride, self-conceit, worldly-mindedness*, being *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*, unfitted them

for understanding the truth, made the Son of God become a *stumbling-block*, and an offence to them to whom he came with terms of salvation.

In one word; Jesus Christ has made the way of life *plain*, not by requiring us to know a great deal, but by obliging us to an honest use of what we know; by giving us *few rules*, which he expects we should remember and observe; by setting us *an example*, which he demands we should imitate; and by affording us *means of grace*, which he requires us to make use of as we hope for happiness. And we may judge of our *sincerity*, and consequently of *our state with God*, by comparing our love for *him* and *his service* with any other passion.

A covetous man, for instance, hears proposals of gain from strangers, from inferiors, and even from enemies. There needs no apology be made to excuse the liberty of speaking to him upon *that subject*; one need not bid him have a care of his interest; he will be sure to do that if he knows it. He is very watchful of those that would wrong him; and will not knowingly do any thing which shall affect and hurt his great design of *enriching himself*. In short, he does all this as naturally as he lives, because his heart is set upon this *one thing, the increasing his substance*.

From which we may set down these *sure marks of our sincerity towards God*. First, That we never consent to known iniquity. 2dly, That we are never uneasy to hear the truth and know our duty. And lastly, that we make use of those means of knowing and doing our duty which God has directed us to.

Thus will our love to God be sincere and manifest. We shall love to please him; we shall easily understand what *will* please him; and we shall be at peace with ourselves, and secure from fear of anger from so good a master.

II. But then, *we must be sure to employ all our gifts and graces, all the talents he bestows upon us, for his honour, in discharging the proper duties of our callings*. For this is another character of a *good and faithful servant*:—“Thou hast been faithful;” that is, thou hast employed the talents I gave thee, in the business I appointed thee. That man, therefore, cannot be called a *good servant*, who will chuse what business he himself pleaseth, to employ his time, and thoughts, and labour upon, and not what his Lord has assigned him, and qualified him for.

And yet *infinite* are the disorders and instances of this nature, and *fatal* the consequences, while people neglect their proper business for what they think a better way of spending their time.

Can



Can a man, qualified for and dedicated to the more immediate service of God, innocently engage himself in *worldly business* inconsistent with such an employment? The same Lord, who has ordained "that they who preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel," has at once appointed the *duty* and the *support* of those that serve at the altar.

But more criminal is the *indiscreet zeal* of those who go into the service before they are sent, and will be teachers of others, before their Lord has declared them qualified for such an office. Will he approve of such a servant? Will he accept, will he reward his service?

If we consider how few are appointed to govern, in comparison of those whose duty it is to obey, one would wonder to find so many of all conditions, as much engaged in modelling the world, and censuring the conduct of those who are *bound* to govern, as if *all* were to *command*, and none to obey. And yet, our Lord is a *God of Order*, and would have all his servants to keep their station, and to observe the duties of their calling; some of which are indeed common to all Christians:—To promote the glory of God; to be examples of piety; to discountenance vice; to comfort the afflicted; and to minister to the necessities of the poor and miserable.

In all which duties there is a very great latitude left, that people may have an opportunity of manifesting their zeal and piety towards God, and their compassion and charity towards men.

But the *duties* of our *calling* are limited to *particular* persons, as the providence of God has ordered it. And every man will have enough to do to see his own duties handsomely discharged, without engaging in those in which he has nothing do.

If parents and masters govern their children and servants well; if these are dutiful and faithful to them; if magistrates act as if they had a master in heaven; and they that ought to obey do it for conscience sake; if men are just in their dealings one with another, and cheerfully aim at the public good; there is no better way of *promoting the glory of God*, and *securing our title to Heaven*.

It is by these things we approve ourselves *Christians* indeed; manifest *our faith* by *our works*; and are more sure that we are under the conduct of the Spirit of God, by a faithful discharge of these relative duties, than by any other instance or pretence whatever.

Even *fasting*, and *prayer*, and *alms*, or any other acts or expressions of devotion, are nothing in the account of God, if we do not

hereby become better *men*, better *neighbours*, better *Christians*, in that state of life unto which it has pleased God to call us.

III. The last character of a faithful servant is, *that he often calls himself to an account; amends where he has done amiss; and uses proper means for avoiding mistakes for the time to come.*

This is found necessary in the common concerns of life; much more is it so with respect to our duty to God, and *the concerns of eternity*; lest we fall into such *ignorance*, or *inconsideration*, as will lead us into sin without thinking of it. For then, our sins are as much *wilful*, as if we should say in our hearts, this we *will* do though we know God has forbidden us.

It is a dangerous error we are apt to run into—We are in *a good way*; we find ourselves *heartly* in it; we resolve to pursue it as long as we live; and we apprehend no danger, or that ever we shall miscarry, having given ourselves to God's service. But then we do not remember, that all the intimations of Scripture, which speak of the danger of *drawing back*, of *falling away*, are all to no purpose, if, as long as we are in this world, we were not liable to be undone, if we continue not *faithful unto death*, careful of our ways even unto our lives' end; which it is *not possible to do*, without *calling ourselves often to an account*, and charging ourselves with the errors we have committed, in order to avoid them for the future.

By this means, if we have done any action which either was in itself, or in the manner of doing it, unfit to be done by a *servant of God*, or to an end unworthy of a Christian, and we resolve to forbear that for the time to come,—to avoid all occasions of temptation, and use such means as are proper to prevent a relapse; by doing this, we know what we have to answer for, we keep *peace* with God, and keep all *quiet* within.

On the other hand, very *dreadful* have been the consequences of *neglecting this duty*.—People have forgot themselves, their vows, their duty, and their God; have fallen in love with sins which once they abhorred; and have increased their accounts to such a length, that nothing but the sight of death could force them to look upon them. The consequence of which has *too often* been *confusion* and *despair*.

But why should we ever suffer matters to come to this extremity? Why should we neglect or be afraid to see how our accounts stand betwixt us and our Lord?

Blessed be God, that we serve a master who knows our infirmities, who will accept of our repentance, and forgive all that is past, if we sincerely purpose to serve him



more faithfully. A master, who will command us nothing but what is reasonable and for our good; who cannot mistake our honest intentions, and will accept of our sincere endeavours instead of a perfect obedience; and who will reward us, *not according to our works, but according to his mercy and promise in Jesus Christ*. Here is no room for complaint, no room for fear, much less for despair.

Let such as are *most apt to despond* view a *servant*, who is always prepared to do his Lord's will, is always pleased to know it, is angry with himself whenever it has been his misfortune to have done amiss, and takes more care for the time to come not to run into mistakes. On the other hand, let him look upon the *Lord of that servant*, as very desirous of the welfare of his whole family; reasonable in all his commands, concerned to have his household carefully instructed in their duty, easy to be intreated when matters have gone wrong, satisfied with the *good meaning and honest endeavours* of such as could not come up to the utmost of their duty; lastly, just to all his promises, and kind to his faithful servants beyond their expectations. No man, who considers that this is really the character, these the properties, of the Lord of the World, can despair of approving himself to God, unless this be his

case,—*that he cannot resolve to become the faithful servant just now described*.

But whether we are *faithful or otherwise*, accountable we *must* be, whether we will or no. — We have *all* received talents, even those that think they have been most overlooked; and we must all one day answer for the use we have made of them.

It is true, our Lord and Master is kind and good; but then he is *just* as well as merciful; and if his gifts are neglected, his promises despised, his commands broken without regret, and his goodness abused, he *can* be *severe*, he *has been so* in instances innumerable, and he has declared that he will be so, and give to every man according to his works, whether they have done good or evil.

God Almighty make us all truly sensible of this, that we may *fear* where we have reason so to do, and be *cheerful* where we have none; that we may have always in our eye the *prize* of our calling, which will be sufficient to encourage us under difficulties, excite our best endeavours, and reward all our labours.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen*.

## S E R M O N XIII.

### TRUE REPENTANCE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

Awaken, O God, the Spirit of Repentance in this drowsy, thoughtless World, which stands so much in need of it;—make me a faithful, successful Preacher of true Repentance;—pour down thy Holy Spirit upon my heart, and upon the hearts of all that shall hear these Truths, that we may all repent and turn to God with all our hearts, and bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of Life, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen*.

MATTHEW iii. 8, 9, 10.

*Bring forth fruits meet for repentance; (that is, answerable to amendment of life;) and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. Now the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.*<sup>1</sup>

**T**HESE words discover to us a truth which most Christians are not aware of, and which they will be surprized at when they hear it; and it is this:—*That too many are ruined, not so much by their sins, as by their very repentance; that is, they mistake, and take that for repentance which will never do them any service, and which God will never accept of for the pardon of their sins.*

Sinners we are, every soul of us, and every soul of us would come short of heaven, if God in mercy had not provided and offered us a remedy for our sins. This remedy is a *true repentance*. Every Christian who lays hold of it will most certainly be pardoned, and saved, and be happy for ever. Every one who despises, neglects, or wilfully mistakes this remedy, will as surely be shut out

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxviii. 13. If. iv. 6, 7. Jer. iii. 12, 13. Ezek. xviii. 27. Mark vi. 12. 2 Cor. vii. 10.



of heaven, and be punished eternally, as God, and this Word<sup>a</sup> of his are true.

If this will not make you very attentive to what I am going to say upon this subject of Repentance, I have no other arguments to prevail with you. For this is the very argument, or motive, which the Spirit of God in the text made use of, to awaken the Jewish nation, and to prepare them for receiving the mercies of the Gospel just going to be offered them. "The ax, (saith the holy Baptist) the ax is laid to the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire:" Assuring us by this, that the fruit of *Repentance* is that which God expects from us, and which of his great mercy, for Christ's sake, he will accept of; but if this fruit does not appear in our lives, we must expect nothing less than to be cut off by death, and to be burnt with fire unquenchable: There being no other choice for Christian people, but a *true repentance*, or ruin.

Every Christian, therefore, who lays any thing to heart, will be glad to be informed from the Word of God,

First, *concerning the reason and necessity of Repentance, and in what True Repentance does consist.*

Secondly, *what are those mistakes concerning repentance, which Christians are liable to fall into.*

And lastly, *how a Christian may have the sure comfort of knowing whether his repentance will be accepted of God, for his pardon and salvation.*

And these are the particulars, that by the good grace of God, which I beseech him to vouchsafe me, I purpose at this time to lay before you, and to charge upon myself.

I. I must, first of all, explain to you THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE. Not only John the Baptist, but our Lord himself and his Apostles, began their ministry by exhorting and requiring people to repent, as they hoped to be saved; plainly shewing, that no man can receive the Gospel—can be a Christian—without forsaking his sins, which are against natural reason and conscience: For he that will not forsake a sin which his own conscience tells him he ought not to live in, will not receive a revelation which his own reason may tell him comes from God.

This, you see, shews the absolute necessity of repentance, in order to a man's being a Christian,—of his receiving the Gospel to any saving purposes.

<sup>a</sup> The Bible.

We are all of us *the sinful race of Adam*;—we have, every one of us, the *root*, the *spring*, the *seed*, the *fountain* of every evil, within us;—and the best of us would be as wicked as the worst we know, if we were left entirely to ourselves. And as it is, the very best of us have done many—many things which are hateful to God; and therefore an Holy God could never have taken pleasure in such sinful creatures, had not Jesus Christ put us into a way of regaining his favour, if we will but close with the means of salvation offered them in the Gospel: That is, if men *will repent and turn to God*,—if they will forsake their sins, which are hateful to God, and *bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life*,—if they do this, they shall be pardoned every sin that is past, and be made happy when they die.

Now, it is for this very end that God has given, and continues to us, our lives;—that laying hold of *this* mercy, we may repent,—our corrupt nature may be mended,—and that we may be restored to the image of God, and be fit for Paradise when we die.

This, I say, is God's great design in setting us in this state of trial, to *qualify us for eternal happiness*, and at the same time, to manifest his own most glorious perfections:—That we may adore his Almighty Power, which can enable such poor weak creatures to overcome the greatest difficulties, the temptations of the *flesh*, the *world*, and the *devil*;—that we may adore—his wonderful *patience*, in bearing with our perverseness,—his infinite *mercy* and *goodness*, in pardoning us upon our true repentance,—and his severe *justice*, in punishing those who will not be prevailed upon, by so much goodness, to repent, and lead a new life.

By this time you see the absolute necessity of repentance to salvation, and that *True Repentance consists in such a sorrow for having offended God, as is followed by a change of mind, and amendment of life.*

And whether this sorrow proceeded at the first from fear, or from a concern for having abused the goodness of so gracious a God; yet if it bring forth fruit answerable to amendment of life, it will be accepted; that is, if the sinner, being made sensible of the mercy of God for Christ's sake to all true penitents, shall resolve with holy Job,—“Where I have done iniquity, I will do so no more.” If he resolves with the people of Israel, “All that the Lord shall command me, that will I do.” If these resolutions are followed by an hatred of every thing that a man believes may displease God;—by avoiding as much as possible all temptations to sin;—by a sincere endeavour to lead an holy and a Christian life;—and lastly,



lastly, by using the means which God has ordained to keep us from *backsliding*;—such a person is a true penitent, and in the sure way to heaven and happiness.

But then, I must not conceal it from you, that all this is not so soon done as advised or resolved upon; the *world*, the *flesh*, and the *devil*, are not so easily overcome as renounced. Habits of virtue and goodness are not acquired at once; and the way to eternal happiness, our Lord assures us, is narrow and difficult, and will require pains and striving to pass through it safely.

What then must be done? Must we sit still, and be content to perish? That is a frightful thought indeed; and God, to make it still more terrible, has made known to us a truth, that if attended to will awaken the most drowsy sinner alive;—*they that have done evil, (lived wicked lives) and do not repent, shall go into everlasting fire.*

Few people can hear this without some thoughts and purposes of repentance; but then, to avoid the difficulties of a true repentance, the corrupt heart of man has ever been seeking for expedients to make it more easy and consistent with an unconverted life.

Thus the Jews flattered themselves that God, for the sake of Abraham their father, would pass by *their* faults more easily than those of other people; but the holy Baptist, in the text, assures them to the contrary. And indeed, from the beginning, they were told this in very plain words, and that their being the children of Abraham would not secure them against the displeasure of God. “If ye at all forget the Lord your God, ye shall surely perish, as the nations perished which the Lord destroyed before your face.”—Notwithstanding this, Christians have multiplied these mistakes to the ruin of infinite souls.

II. Many are apt to think, that *repentance is only necessary* when people have fallen into great and crying sins; and that *when they have forsaken such sins*, though for the fear of temporal punishment only, *they are in the way of salvation*. Many imagine, that *their repentance is over*, when they have expressed their sorrow for having done amiss, and begged God's pardon. Too many are persuaded that *repentance is in their own power*, and that they can set about it and perform it when they please. And too, too many *put off their repentance* to the very end of their lives.

These are sad mistakes among Christians; who will often find to their astonishment those sins charged upon them, which they hoped they had repented of, and were forgiven.

Now, to prevent these mistakes, the Spirit of God has joined *repentance* and *conversion* together. “Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.” So that no degree of *sorrow*, no *penance*, no *mortification*, no *confession*, no *absolution*, which is not attended with amendment of life, will avail any thing in the sight of God.

Not only notorious sinners, but all men living, have need of repentance to restore them to the favour of God;—and to think that repentance is in our own power without the grace of God, is as absurd as it would be to think to raise the dead by our own power; the one being as great a miracle as the other.

Let it be observed, moreover, that a short sorrow, and asking pardon of God, is so far from being repentance, that a *Christian's whole life ought to be a state of repentance*; that is, he *ought*, and he *will*, if he be a true penitent, all his life long lament and strive against the corruption of his nature, and be sorry for the sins he has ever fallen into, whenever he remembers them. He will evermore *watch* over his own heart; oppose every evil inclination; and immediately beg forgiveness of God, whenever any sin has got the mastery of him against his settled purposes.

In short; a Christian, for these reasons, will never think himself excused, to his dying day, from *self-denial*, from *watching* and *prayer*; Jesus Christ having made these the *standing means* of repentance unto life.

But the great mistake and delusion of all is *the depending upon a late, a Death-bed Repentance*.

Christians should consider, that the Spirit of God, by requiring us *to bring forth fruits meet for repentance*, has shewed us the absurdity, the danger, the inexpressible danger, of putting off our repentance *till the night come when no man can work*.

And indeed, every body must see, that there would be no necessity of a good life, if a man may be unjust, or unmerciful, or covetous, or a drunkard, or an adulterer, a profaner of God, his name, or his ordinances, and yet may hope for mercy when he comes to die, upon his being sorry for his wicked life, and begging God's pardon.

Let it be further considered, that God has positively declared, that he will render to every man according to his works. Now, if a man has done no good works (after his repentance) to balance his evil deeds, what can he hope for but judgment without mercy?

In short; though an evil liver should, when he comes to die, be never so sorry for



his sins, and resolve sincerely to change his life, yet such a person has no promise from God, that his repentance shall be accepted:—The promise, you have heard, is to such as repent and turn to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance. And accordingly the tree, that had not brought forth good fruit, after patience and pains had been spent on it in vain, was to be *cut down and burnt*.

I know very well what will be said to this, *that it may drive dying sinners to despair*; but I am not now speaking to *dying sinners*; I am speaking to such as have it in their power, by the grace of God, to repent before they come into that sad condition, which no man in his right mind would venture his soul upon *for this whole world*.

There were cases under the law which God reserved to himself, even so we must leave the fate of a *death-bed repentance* to the uncovenanted mercy of God.

There have been persons so unhappily educated, and so extremely ignorant, that when they have come to die, it has appeared that they knew nothing almost of their *duty*, or their *danger*. Such pitiable circumstances may find mercy with God; but such as live in a continued course of sin, rejecting the means of instruction, despising the means of conversion, hardening themselves against all methods of God for their salvation;—such can have little comfort administered unto them when they come to die. Nor will any minister or priest of God, who understands the Gospel and his duty, dare to give any assurance, or other advice, to such unhappy people, than to exhort them to do all that is in their power, and to leave the issue to God;—to confess, and detest, their hatred and contempt of God, and his laws, with the utmost abhorrence;—to let all that come to see them know what an evil and bitter thing it is, when one comes to die, to look back upon an ill-spent life;—to warn them, as they love their own souls, to repent in time, lest they also come into that state of torment. And lastly, to accept of sorrow and anguish of mind, as a just punishment, and such as their case requires.

Such humiliations as these will have their weight with God; if not to pardon their sins, yet at least to lessen their punishment, and to keep them from despair.

III. We come now to consider *how a Christian may have the comfort of knowing whether his repentance be such as will be accepted of God for his pardon and salvation*.

And, in the first place, every man living may have the comfort of knowing *assuredly*, that his sins, *though never so great*, will be pardoned upon his true repentance. We

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have the word and the oath of the Son of God for this: “Verily, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men.”

And every Christian may be assured, that if God has given him the spirit of *repentance*; that is, a fear for himself,—a sorrow for having offended God,—a desire of returning to his duty, and of being reconciled to his Maker,—he may be assured, that his sin is not *that unpardonable sin* excepted by our Lord, THE SIN AGAINST THE HOLY GHOST. He may be assured of this, because it is the Holy Ghost who gives him *this spirit*,—who gives him *grace*, and a *desire*, and a *will*, to repent,—who therefore has not utterly forsaken him;—that is, he has not sinned *the sin unto death*, as the Apostle calls it.<sup>1</sup>

His next concern, therefore, must be to look to his *repentance*, that it be such as the Gospel requires; for upon *that* his safety, and the whole comfort of his life and death, depend.

For example:—His <sup>high</sup>conscience must witness for him, that he does not live in any known sin; if he does, he is no true penitent, though he has forsaken never so many evil ways. A good Christian may indeed fall into a sin, through surprise,—through the force of a temptation,—for want of keeping a strict watch over himself;—but he is no longer a good Christian, or a true penitent, if, being made sensible of his fault, he does not immediately repent of it, and resolve to do so no more. Thus did Saint Peter—thus did David—and thus will every Christian do, who considers that he ventures no less a stake than his own soul, who ventures to live one moment in any known sin.

Secondly; a true penitent,—his conscience must witness for him, that he does not live in a wilful neglect of any known duty. “Cease to do evil, learn to do well.”—“Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” This is the *language*, this the *design*, both of the *Law* and the *Gospel*. Let no man, therefore, comfort himself with saying, that he leads an harmless life. Every man has his proper duty and talents, for which he must answer; so that no man can say he leads an *harmless life*, who leads an *useless life*, or who neglects the duties of his place and state of life.

Thirdly; a true penitent,—his conscience must witness for him, that he keeps a *strict watch* over himself, for *fear of backsliding*. “Watch and pray, that ye fall not into temptation.” This is a Gospel rule, never to be dispensed with,—never to be forgotten;—without which no man can be secure of his perseverance.

<sup>1</sup> Mark iii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah i. 16.

<sup>3</sup> John v. 16.

<sup>4</sup> Matth. xxvi. 41.

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Lastly;



Lastly; a true penitent,—his conscience must witness for him, that he strives to please God in every thing to the best of his power. This is the surest proof of a Christian's sincerity, and of the truth of his *repentance*, when he can say, This I avoid, this I abhor, because I believe it will displease God;—when he can truly say, This I do, this I undertake, this I suffer, because I believe it is the will of God, and will be for his glory. Whoever is in this way is a true penitent, his sins will be forgiven, and he is in the sure way of salvation;—*these being fruits answerable to amendment of life.*

But that a Christian may keep in this way, it will be necessary that he call himself often to an account;—that every night he beg forgiveness of those sins which through frailty he has committed the day past;—and that he omit none of those means which God has ordained to keep Christians from backsliding, and from falling into the snare of the devil: One of which the church has provided in her daily service,—a standing and an effectual means of obtaining pardon for all such as sincerely close with it;—that is, for all such as having with all true humility confessed their sins unto God, do secretly beg of him, that the *pardon pronounced by his own Minister* may become effectual for the forgiveness of all their sins.

Only remember, that it is a mere mocking of God to confess our sins, without a sincere purpose of forsaking them; and that the absolution pronounced by the Priest of God will only benefit those *who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto God.* And to such—to such as are *truly penitent*—the daily absolution will be an invaluable blessing and comfort, even as great as it is to be satisfied, *that their pardon is sealed in heaven.*

Another means of grace, and pardon, and salvation, is offered us in the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.* And a Christian must be very ignorant, or very little concerned for his salvation, who will turn his back upon that ordinance, which is designed to seal unto all worthy receivers the pardon of all their sins.

By this time, I hope you see, and are convinced, that *repentance* is not so much a law imposed upon you, as a *favour* and a *privilege of the Gospel*;—that it is the greatest mercy vouchsafed unto sinners, who, when they have forfeited the favour of God, are not utterly cast off, but have the promise of pardon, and this upon most reasonable terms.

But then we must be careful not to abuse this great privilege; that we be not bold to provoke God, because he has been so good as to promise to pardon us upon our true repentance;—always remembering, that *God's great design* in accepting of our repentance is

this, *that we may live to his glory the remainder of our days*;—that we may shew in our conversion, the *power* of his grace, the *riches* of his goodness and mercy, the *faithfulness* of his promises, and the *holiness* of his laws.

By this you see, *that a Christian's whole life ought to be a state of repentance*;—that we ought, all our days, to be labouring after holiness and perfection, getting the mastery over our corruptions, and doing good in our generation. And we shall not defer this one moment, if we consider that the servant in the Gospel, who had most improved his talents, had the greatest reward; and that the sooner we repent, the more happy we shall be when we die.

This shews the madness of those who will be making experiments, how long they may go on in a careless way of living, and still hope that God will be gracious to them, and accept of their repentance. For there is a time *when* (as God himself has declared) *he will not be found of them that seek him.* Besides this, every moment we defer our repentance, we lessen our own happiness.

But above all, let us consider, that repentance is a work of time, of pains, of sorrow, and uneasy to flesh and blood;—that the ways of sin are extremely hazardous, and a return to our duty very uncertain:—that, therefore, *they* are wise and happy, who are taught betimes to fear God and walk in his ways,—who can say with the eldest son in the Gospel, “I never disobeyed thy commands.” You know the father's answer: “Son, all that I have is thine.”

And indeed the goodness of God has so ordered matters, that this might be the happy case of many more Christians, if it were not plainly our own fault.

At our *baptism* he gives us his Holy Spirit to be the principle of a new life to us,—an all-powerful Spirit, able to keep us in the ways and in the favour of God to our lives' end.

Were parents careful to instruct their children, how to improve and how to preserve this mighty blessing, what an alteration should we see in the Christian world! But, alas! they are suffered to grow up in ignorance, to get evil habits, to grieve the Holy Spirit by which they were sanctified, and very often to fall again into the snare, and power, and kingdom of Satan. It is then they must be plainly told, that they have no other choice *but repentance or damnation.*—And, God knows, this is often told to such as turn a deaf ear to so dreadful a truth. They are in the power of a Master who will not suffer them to fear till it be too late to repent, unless the Almighty God, by a miracle of mercy, interpose his power. And this



this he does sometimes *by the discipline of his Church*; and would oftener do it, did not wicked men oppose this gracious method of his providence for the conversion of sinners.

But then you see the great sin of those, who go about to set at nought, to pull down, or to despise and abuse, such a powerful means of grace and conversion, which has God for its author, and is ordained to remove scandals out of his church,—to awaken and to humble sinners,—to prevent their being hardened in wickedness, and from corrupting others,—to beget in all a fear of falling,—to prevent the judgments of God from falling upon the society,—and lastly, to make some reparation to the honour of God for his abused authority. These are the ends of *church discipline*, and which many a sinner, I hope, has reason to bless God for.

To proceed:—By this time, I hope, good Christians, you see, *that your everlasting welfare depends upon the sincerity of your repentance*; this being the only way by which a sinner can possibly be restored to the favour of God, and put into the way of salvation. You see that repentance is the gift of God, and that it must be begged of him with a sincere design of forsaking every evil way.

To encourage us to think, in good earnest, of setting about so necessary a work, God is so good as to offer us all the assistance that we can possibly want: And that we may not flatter ourselves, that it may not be so ill with us as has been intimated, Jesus Christ himself has told us what will be the punishment of sin unrepented of: *Eternal darkness, —pain of body, and anguish of mind,—unquenchable fire,—AND THESE FOR EVER!*

Will any man, in his right mind, who *hears*, who *believes*, these words of the Son of God, live one moment under the hazard and dread of dying in his sins? If, therefore, any of you, who now hear and understand me, are convinced that you live in any known sin, or very frequently fall into the same sins,—be persuaded, as you love your souls, from this moment to begin your repentance, to forsake every sin, *though as dear to you as a right hand or a right eye*. They are the words of Jesus Christ that I am going to repeat:—“It is better for you to enter into life, halt, or maimed, or with one eye, than to go whole and sound to hell, *into the fire that never shall be quenched*,” which words our Lord repeats *three times*; that Christians may never forget them; that they may repent in time, and never go into *that place of torment*.

You see how dangerous a thing it is to fancy ourselves safe, when indeed we are not so. Think not, therefore, to say to your-

selves, *We are Christians*;—we are members of a body of which Christ is the head, for which he gave his most precious blood;—we have the means of grace and salvation amongst us.

Oh, Christians! how many souls are there, who, this moment, are bitterly lamenting the ill use they made of these blessings, when they were in this state of trial! Let us, who are yet alive, think seriously of this; and resolve, by the grace of God, to lead a life worthy of the religion we profess—of the means and hopes of salvation, which God has vouchsafed us—and mindful of the misery we are liable to in case we miscarry.

It is easy and it is common to say, *We are all sinners*; but it is not always considered that such sinners as repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, shall be *saved*; and that such as do not so shall be *damned*. This sure makes a mighty difference betwixt sinners and sinners.

You see what hazard a Christian runs by returning again into the sins he has repented of. “Sin no more, (saith our Lord) sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” And indeed, one may appeal to any man’s conscience, whether he does not find, that the oftener he returns to the sins he has repented of, the more *careless* and *hardened* he grows, and more bold to sin.

And if you are not convinced, by what has been said, of the irreparable danger of trusting to a *death-bed repentance*, do but consider what you would think of a man who should preach such a doctrine as this:—Christians, notwithstanding God has expressly commanded you to forsake your sins, and to lead holy lives, as ever you hope for pardon and to escape the damnation of hell;—notwithstanding God has declared that this is the utmost mercy to be depended on;—yet I will promise you pardon and happiness, if, after an ill-spent life, you are very sorry when you come to die.—This is what Christians will not bear to hear, and yet it is what is every day depended upon without scruple.

And now, Christians, if you have attended to what has been said, you will be able better to judge of your state, whether you are really in the way of salvation or perdition. If you can truly say, that you have forsaken every known sin,—that you resist the corruption of your nature,—that you immediately repent of any sin which through surprise or frailty you fall into;—that you pray for God’s grace continually, for light to see, and for power to do your duty, keeping out of the way of temptations as much as possible;—if you can truly say, that by this way your heart is changed as well as

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xviii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Mark ix. 43, &c.

<sup>3</sup> John v. 14.



your outward behaviour, and that you see the fruits of your repentance in the holiness of your life;—why then you may, with an humble confidence, speak peace unto your soul.

'Till then, Religion will be a burthen to you,—you will be a burthen to yourselves,—you cannot love God,—you cannot, *as prodigious a sin as it is*, you cannot but hate him, because you can expect no good from him;—you can expect nothing but that his judgments will some time or other overtake you for your sins. And this is the reason, that all who live in their sins unrepented of do secretly wish that there were no God to call them to an account; and, from wishing, come at last to believe there is no God.

And now, Christians, you see plainly from what has been said, that it is not so much any law or decree of God that shuts sinners out of heaven, but the very condition of their nature makes it impossible for them to be happy;—that therefore our nature must be mended before we can hope for any favour from God;—we must forsake every thing that we believe will displease him, and we must accustom ourselves to love and to do what he has commanded.

This is that *repentance*, that *duty*, which has been set before you at this time. And,

that you may consider very seriously of *what has been said*, I will leave these following truths upon your minds. First; that there is no repentance in the grave;—that the night is coming on apace *when no man can work*;—that the end of sin is not to be seen in this life;—that the next life is the life of rewards or punishments;—that the more we deny, the more we punish ourselves for our sins, the less punishment, and the more favour, we may expect from God:—“If we would judge ourselves, (saith St. Paul\*) we should not be judged”—condemned of the Lord:—that by deferring our repentance, we do not only hazard our souls, but lessen our reward if ever we do repent. And lastly, that if a man, when he comes to die, has not this proof of his repentance, that his life has been such as it should be; namely, *sober, chaste, upright, just, merciful*; he will want one of the greatest comforts of a death-bed—one of the surest marks of a repentance unto life.

Awaken, O God, the spirit of repentance in this careless world, which stands so much in need of it. Pour down thy Holy Spirit upon the hearts of all that hear these truths, that they may repent and turn to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, for Jesus Christ's sake. To whom, &c.

\* 1 Cor. xi. 31.

## S E R M O N XIV.

CHRISTMAS-DAY.

THE GREAT BLESSING AND THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF A REDEEMER.

*The Collect for the Communion Service, in King Edward's Common Prayer, early in the Morning.*

O GOD, who makest us glad with the yearly remembrance of the Birth of thine only Son Jesus Christ; grant, that as we joyfully receive him for our Redeemer, so we may with sure confidence behold him when he shall come to be our Judge, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end. Amen.

LUKE ii. 10.

*Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.\**

THESE are the words, this the message, of God, by his Angel, to a company of shepherds, the night our Saviour Christ was born. The whole account is as follows: “And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the Angel said unto them, “Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this *shall be* a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising

\* See Isaiah lii. 7. John iii. 16. 2 Cor. vi. 2. Rom. x. 15. 1 John iv. 6.

“God,



"God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men."

*These are the good tidings of great joy, which we are now going to put you in mind of, and to explain to you.*

The first thing which, *at this time*, we should consider is, the wonderful goodness of the great God, the Maker of heaven and earth, who in compassion to his poor creatures did send—not an Angel, but—his own Son, to redeem us from the sad condition our sins had brought us into. He sent his Son into the world, "that the world through him might be saved." God grant that every soul here present may, through faith in his blood, make his coming into the world effectual to every one's own salvation; and then it will be matter of joy indeed to all of us, who *now* solemnly remember his incarnation and birth.

That we may do it with more sincere joy and thankfulness, we will consider the evils and dangers which, as fallen and sinful creatures, we are all subject to.

We are subject to a corrupt heart,—to the malice and power of evil spirits,—to a proneness in our nature to evil continually,—to the temptations of an evil world,—to a weakness of nature, which of itself cannot withstand temptations,—to a continual fear of death, and of what may be our condition after death,—to the thoughts of a judgment to come, and the dread of the sentence then to be passed upon all men.

Now, the thoughts of these evils would make the stoutest heart to tremble, and are enough to distract the wisest man alive, if the God of mercy had not proposed a way to deliver us from this bondage.

This will shew us the blessing of our Saviour's coming into the world, and the infinite mercies we shall receive thereby, if it is not our own fault.

As fallen creatures, we had forfeited all the favours which God designed us at our creation. We then lost that Holy Spirit, by which we had power to know and to do our duty, whatever God expected from us. By the loss of that Holy Spirit, our reason became corrupt, and not sufficient to guide us in the way of truth and salvation;—our will and our affections became ungovernable, and we became subject to every temptation to sin; and as such, God, an Holy God, could take no pleasure in us.

This shews us the *absolute necessity of a Redeemer*,—of one who could undertake to make satisfaction to the Divine Justice for

<sup>v</sup> John iii. 17.

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the sins and offences of a whole world;—who was worthy to plead with the great God for his rebellious creatures;—who was able to prevail with God to pardon what was past, and to receive them again into favour.

Who does not see the necessity of some one, who might let us know upon what terms God would forgive sinners,—who could put us in a sure way of salvation;—of one who could obtain for us that Holy Spirit, which could help us to subdue all our enemies temporal and spiritual;—who could set us in his own person an example, how we ought to walk so as to please God, and to deliver us from the wrath to come?

Now, all this our Redeemer, our Lord Christ, has done for us. He has given us the greatest assurance, that God, his Father, will for his sake be reconciled unto us,—that he will accept of our repentance,—that he will treat us, and deal with us, as he would have done with our first parents, had they not so grievously transgressed his command, provided we will be governed by Him; that is, *he will make us happy for ever*. That in order to this, he will give us his Holy Spirit, to sanctify and to amend our corrupt nature. And, what is the most astonishing mercy, he has prevailed with God to make us everlastingly happy, if, during this short life of trial, we will but strive to fit ourselves for that state of happiness.—And, to magnify these blessings, he has assured us, that every soul that shall be born, from the first man that was made to the last that shall come into the world, may have an interest in God's pardon, and in the happiness he proposeth, if he does not lose it by his own fault.

Now, to set this home upon our hearts, and to teach us to rejoice with reason for these blessings, let us turn our thoughts upon ourselves, and consider for whom God has been so wonderfully good and kind.

As for ourselves, we are a race of poor, wretched, sinful creatures, made such by our own fault; who have no merits of our own to move God to have the least pity for us. On the other hand, if we consider his Divine Majesty, he hath millions and millions of creatures better than the best of us, who never offended him, on whom to bestow his favours.

What then can we think, but that the great God should have overlooked so vile a part of his creation, and left them to themselves? But to send his own Son to bring them back to their duty and happiness! This love, this mercy of God, passeth our understanding, and deserves all the thanks we can possibly render him.

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And



And the truth is, we could never have believed it, had not his Son laid down his life to assure us of his Father's compassion for his otherwise lost creatures.

This love of God for lost mankind will still appear more wonderful, when we consider, that he made his Son to be subject to the law and punishment due to sinners, and to all the miseries and afflictions which sinners have brought upon themselves. To *poverty*; for he had not where to lay his head. To *contempt*; for he was made the scorn of men. To *pain* and *sorrow*, and to *death* after all, in order to deliver us from eternal death.

In order to this, he took our nature upon him, that he might be seen by men, and converse with them, and set us an example how we ought to live so as to please God. He appeared indeed in a poor and humble manner, though he was Lord of the world and of all things in it. But this was to teach us to put no more value on the good things of this world than what they deserve;—to convince men that the happiness which he has purchased for us is beyond any thing we can enjoy in this life;—and that he might set us an example of great humility, of submission to the will of God, and to the condition of life in which his providence shall place us: And lastly, to make us sensible what a sin it will be, to despise the poor, and such as are in a mean condition, since He himself, by the order of his Heavenly Father, was to appear in the world in such a condition of poverty.

It is now time to consider what, in this state of life, Jesus Christ has done for us. He made known to men the only true God, who alone can make us happy. He shewed us what service and worship was due to him from men. He came to offer from God the forgiveness of sins to all men upon their true repentance. He came to let us know for certain, that sin unpardoned will be our ruin for ever;—that God would have all men to repent, and be saved;—that he will make intercession with his Father for all such as will leave their sins and lead holy lives;—that he will deliver all such from the prevailing power of Satan, as go unto God by him; and from the wrath to come. And finally, he will, if it be not our own fault, restore us to the image of God, in which our first parents were created, and make us partakers of a divine nature in this life, and in the life to come for ever happy.

And now, my Christian brethren, let none of us imagine, that God intended that all this love should be lost upon us; or that he expects no other fruits of his own infinite goodness to us, or of his Son's humility and

labours to save us, but a bare outward joy and rejoicing.

We do indeed, in our daily prayers, give God thanks in an especial manner for his inestimable love in the redemption of the world, by our Lord Jesus Christ: A love, indeed; which passeth all possible expression on our part. But what will this signify, if in the manner of our lives we appear to have no knowledge or sense of the blessing of a Saviour?

What then doth God expect for all this love? Why; that we should love him, and live like people that do so. That we should obey his commands. That we should honour him by our holy lives. That we should convince all that see us, that we are Christians in deed and in truth, and that we love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity for the love he has shewn us. That we should seriously resolve, with those mentioned in the Book of Wisdom,\* that we will not sin, knowing that we are accounted thy children. That we should not debase ourselves, nor dishonour our Blessed Redeemer, by becoming the slaves of sin and Satan, from whom he has redeemed us by his most precious blood.—But to shew our gratitude by fruits worthy of so great a mercy; especially in these sad days, wherein the name of Jesus Christ is blasphemed by unbelievers, occasioned chiefly by the bad lives of Christians,—but then they are such Christians as are sure to be shut out of heaven, for being worse than infidels.

In short; all our hopes of pardon, the acceptance of our persons and our prayers, the grace of God, the conquest of our spiritual enemies, all our hopes of heaven, do all depend upon the Son of God, whose coming into the world we now celebrate with joy.

Let us only consider to whom these tidings of joy belong. Why; to every penitent sinner,—to every one who fears God, and is afraid for himself,—to every one who loves God, and desires to do what shall please him;—in short, to every one who is concerned for his own soul, and hopes for salvation through Jesus Christ. To all such as these, the knowledge of Jesus Christ will be good tidings of great joy.

On the other hand, all such as live in their sins unrepented of; such as are unjust, covetous, hard-hearted, revengeful, malicious, drunkards, profane, and the like; these cannot, ought not, to rejoice: And for a very dreadful reason, forasmuch as this same Jesus, we are assured, will come to judge the world in righteousness, and to give to every man

\* Chap. xv.



according to the works done in the body, whether good or evil.

I would not detain you from the solemn service of this day; but a few words I would leave upon your memory. For example: When Christians hear such gracious words as these, *that God sent his Son into the world to save sinners*;—that such as receive and believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life;—they are too apt to fancy, that they are in no great danger, since Jesus Christ has paid our ransom. Let us have a care of abusing, instead of magnifying, the mercy of God.

Jesus Christ has indeed redeemed us from the wrath to come; but then he must redeem us first from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a people zealous of good works.

We may be assured that the case of sinners and their punishment will be unspeakably dreadful, since the only Son of God left the glories of heaven, to lead a poor and humble life on earth, for no other end than to convince sinners that if they were not reconciled unto God, their loss would be great, and their misery beyond expression, and without remedy.

You will observe, (and it ought to increase your joy) that our redemption and all the steps leading to it, is matter of mere grace. When God sent his Son into the world, there was nothing in us to move him to it, but his own infinite goodness, and our infinite misery.

Whatever pretence Adam and his posterity might have to the favour of God before the fall, all was forfeited by his transgression; and this is the reason, that *the free grace of God* is so much spoken of in the Gospel; that men may not claim any thing to themselves, but to be *humble, thankful,*

and *obedient*, to the Lord that bought and redeemed them.

To conclude:—The church has sanctified *this day*, and *this season*, in honour of our Blessed Saviour, and of his coming into the world.

Our duty this day is to give God our most sincere thanks for his infinite mercy and goodness in sending his Son into the world, to shew us our duty and our danger; how to perform the one, and to avoid the other.

Now; as this ought to be the subject of our thanks and joy at this time, we should not forget that it was our sins which occasioned our Blessed Lord's humbling himself to be born into the world, that we might not be miserable for ever.

This will help to temper our joys, lest, forgetting our danger, we lose our share in the blessings he came to bring us.

Let all such, therefore, as value themselves for being Christians, and who hope for any benefit from Christ's coming into the world, resolve, in the first place, sincerely to repent of those sins for which he gave his life and blood; and they will not only have joy in themselves, but will occasion joy in heaven.

And may our gracious God fill all our hearts with sincere thanks, as well as our mouths with praise: Then we shall have good reason to rejoice indeed!

Now, unto Him who had compassion on us when we were under the sentence of death, and sent his only Son to deliver us; Blessing, and honour, and glory, and thanksgiving, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the Throne, and to the Lamb, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



## S E R M O N XV.

C H R I S T M A S.

THE MEANING AND THE EXTENT OF THE SALVATION PURCHASED BY JESUS CHRIST, AND THE DREADFUL CASE OF THOSE WHO DESPISE IT.

I TIM. i. 15.

*This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save Sinners.\**

**T**HAT is; there is no truth more certain, no truth more worthy of our knowledge, no truth which so much concerns us to know, or which we may more surely depend on, than this; "That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

But however worthy this truth is to be received of all men, yet few, God knows, receive it as they ought to do. For how many are there, who, because Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, hope for salvation, without taking any care to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ? How many who believe this truth, and yet receive no comfort from it; either suspecting themselves not to be of the number of those whom Christ came to save, or that their sins are too great to be pardoned? And lastly, how very many are there, who, though they are indeed sinners, never think of the danger of being such; and are therefore as careless and unconcerned for what may come hereafter, as if there were nothing to be feared, nothing to be hoped for?

Now, all these being sad delusions and a great dishonour to Christianity, it well becomes the servants of Him, who came into the world to save sinners,—to use their utmost endeavours to remove them;—to support the spirits of those who fear where there is no danger;—to awaken the consciences of those who are secure and careless in the very midst of danger;—and lastly, to reprove the presumption of those who hope for salvation through Jesus Christ without observing his laws.

And these are the things which I beseech you will give attention to with the greatest seriousness. And that I may set these things before you after as plain a manner as possible, we will consider,

*First*; The meaning and extent of this truth, "That Christ Jesus came into the

"world to save sinners;" that we may be able to judge who may, and who may not, hope for salvation through his merits.

*Secondly*; We shall consider the delusion, and the danger, of those who neglect or despise the salvation purchased for them by Jesus Christ.

I. We will first consider the MEANING, and then the EXTENT, of this truth, *That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.*

Now, a sinner is one, who, having broken the laws of God, has reason to fear that God will severely punish him for so doing. He sees very plainly, that he cannot deliver himself from the wrath of an angry God. He is so far from being able to make any satisfaction for the sins he has been guilty of, that he finds in himself a proneness, an inclination to evil, and an aversion, an unwillingness to close with what God has commanded us for our good. This is the condition of a *sinner*;—this is the condition of every man by nature. And a sad condition it will appear to be to every one who knows and considers, that the end of sin is not to be seen in this life; but that a day is coming, in which God will judge the world in righteousness, and give to every man according to the works done in the body.

What sinner, what man living, could think of this without despair, if Jesus Christ had not undertaken to deliver us from the just displeasure of God;—to make satisfaction for our sins;—to restore us to God's favour;—and to put us into a way of being happy for ever?

But what has Jesus Christ done to save sinners from this sad condition? Why; he took upon him the nature of man;—he dwelt amongst men;—made known to them this comfortable truth, that God, *for his sake*, will accept of our repentance; receive us into

\* See Luke xxix. 20.



favour, notwithstanding our past offences; assist us with helps sufficient to do what he expects from us; and will make us eternally happy when we die, if we will suffer ourselves to be governed by his holy laws while we live.

To convince us more effectually of the truth and importance of these things, after he had wrought many wonderful miracles to shew that he came from God, he willingly laid down his life for our sake, for our sins, for our offences; and that God might spare us, and not punish us as we had deserved.

And God, to convince mankind how entirely he was reconciled to them, on account of his Son's death, raised him from the dead, received him into heaven, set him at his own right hand, where he is continually interceding for all those that come unto God by him, that pray to God for his sake.

And that we may have no doubt in our minds but that all this is done in heaven for us, our Lord sent down the Holy Ghost to supply his place on earth; who, having appointed an Order of Men to publish these glad tidings to the whole world, enabled them to work miracles, — to speak languages which before they were ignorant of, — to heal the sick with a word of their mouth, — to raise the dead; — in one word, to do such things as none but such as were sent by God could do.

And lastly, these having fulfilled their ministry, before they laid down their lives for the truths they had preached, they (as Jesus Christ had commanded them) ordained others to supply their places, to preach these truths, to offer these terms of mercy to all succeeding generations, with whom he promised his presence and blessing unto the world's end.

To these he has given power to receive all that are willing into his family, which is his church; to reconcile such as fall, and return from their evil ways; and to represent unto God the satisfaction which his Son has made in our nature for our sins.

This is what Jesus Christ has done for us. He has reconciled us to God; he has put us into a way of salvation; he has given us all necessary assistance, to support our weakness, to resist our enemies, to renew our nature, and to make us fit for heaven and happiness.

But have all men a right to this salvation purchased by Jesus Christ? This we shall see now we come to consider the **EXTENT** of these words, "That Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

And truly, the Scriptures are in nothing more plain than in this truth, "That God so loved the world, that he sent his Son,

"that the world through him might be saved."

That God had no respect of persons in thus loving the world, his will being this, **THAT ALL MEN SHOULD BE SAVED**; — That even such as perish, through their own wilful disobedience, are of the number of those whom Jesus Christ came to save. They denied, saith St. Peter, the Lord that bought them; that bought and would have saved them, but that they brought upon themselves destruction.

Nay, to take away all manner of scruple, and to apply this comfortable truth to the minds of afflicted penitents, St. Paul speaks of this after a most convincing manner: "As the sin of Adam (saith he) affected all his posterity; as by one offence judgment came upon all men to condemnation; so the merits of Christ were designed to redeem all the posterity of Adam; forasmuch as by the righteousness of one, that is, Jesus Christ, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life."

As sure then as I am one of those, who by Adam's transgression am become corrupt and a sinner before God, so sure am I redeemed by Jesus Christ. This every Christian man may say to himself.

This was the very doctrine of Christ himself; and this he taught by his own example, when he prayed for the very persons who crucified him, who had an interest in the very death they made him to suffer; otherwise he would not have prayed that God would forgive them.

And the Church of Christ still continues to intercede with God for all mankind, holding this truth, that the love of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, extends to the whole race of men. By this practice, endeavouring to bring the hearts of believers to that godlike temper of charity and good-will for all that bear the image of God; and, by this practice, supporting the spirits of dejected penitents, who will have no reason to despair, since the greatest sinners are in a capacity of being saved.

We are obliged to say, in a capacity of salvation; for the truth is, All are not saved that Christ came to save. Salvation is indeed offered to all, to whom the Gospel is or has been preached; but all are not disposed to receive it, especially on the terms on which it is offered.

Many are not sensible of the danger they are in; others will not forsake their sins for any consideration whatever; and even too, too many despise the very offers of a Redeemer, of pardon and grace through him.

<sup>a</sup> John iii. 17. <sup>b</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 4. <sup>c</sup> Rom. v.



In all these cases, the Saviour of the world assures us, that it is their own fault, purely their own fault, if they are not saved. "Ye will not come unto me, (saith he) that ye might have life."

If people, when salvation is offered them, will notwithstanding unworthily slight the mercy;—if men to whom God has made himself known, will not retain God in their knowledge;—if those that have been enlightened, and have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;—if they are again entangled therein, and are finally lost;—this is not for want of means to save them, but they will not be saved,—they will not attend to the word preached unto them,—they will not believe the terrors of the world to come,—they will not submit to the terms of salvation. This being their case, their destruction is from themselves.

II. And this brings us to consider, *how very dreadful the case is of those who deny the Lord that bought them, or neglect the offers of salvation made by him to all sinners.*

And indeed, when we consider what Jesus Christ has done, in order to redeem and save us, we shall have the greatest reason to believe, that the punishment of those who are not saved by Him will be unspeakably great. For can we imagine that Christ, the Son of God, would have left the glories of heaven, and would have lived a miserable life on earth, and died a more miserable death, but that he knew, that if sinners were not reconciled to God, but died in their sins, their punishment would be terrible, and their condition miserable, and without remedy.

So that the greatness of the mercy may convince us of the greatness of the punishment of those that despise the salvation offered them. The Spirit of God, from whom only we can know what becomes of men after death, assures us, that such shall be shut out of heaven, and have their portion in a place where there is nothing but weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.

And whatever may become of those who have never had the Gospel preached unto them, they who have had salvation offered to them, and mind it not, must not expect to escape a severe judgment.

And, lest we should think ourselves safe, because we have embraced the Gospel, let us always remember, that the Gospel requires Faith and Repentance of all that expect any benefit by it. We must not only say, we believe the Gospel, but we must live like men that do so;—like men that are in the midst of enemies, with fear and care,

lest we should miscarry;—like those that have escaped eternal misery, with thankful hearts;—and like those who hope to go to heaven, where no impure thing can enter.

But if, instead of doing so, we lead a careless or a wicked life;—if we neglect the means of grace, the ordinances of God, and turn our backs upon the Word and Sacraments;—if we confess we are sinners, and yet take no care to amend our ways;—if we are taken up with the business or pleasures of this life, so as to forget that there is another to come;—why then, in truth, we are not of the number of those who shall be saved; neither will it be any blessing to such, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.

And now, good Christians, you see what a merciful regard God has had for his poor creatures in this dispensation. The most ignorant may know what God expects from them. The greatest sinner may be sure of pardon, if he repents, and brings forth fruit answerable to amendment of life. The weakest Christian may depend upon all necessary assistance. The meanest servant of Christ may be sure not to be overlooked. Lastly, every Christian may be confident, that his labour will not be in vain, but that he may be for ever happy, if it is not altogether his own fault.

These are certain truths, and worthy of all men to be received. How comes it then to pass, that we so often hear these truths without being affected by them? Why, the truth is, we are not well convinced of the danger a sinner is in, without the help of a Redeemer.

If one talks to a sick man about the cause of his illness, and gives him good hopes that his distemper is curable, you need not use many words to persuade him to hear you, because his life is at stake; but if you tell a man that thinks himself well, of a remedy, it is a thousand to one but he forgets it. This is our case—the case of the generality of Christians. We, in obedience to our Lord's command, preach faith, and repentance, and obedience; we publish in his name a free pardon to all who are willing to comply with the terms of salvation. They that lay things to heart,—that know they are sinners, and the danger of being such; these gladly hear, and receive, and remember, and obey, the terms of salvation; whilst others are as unconcerned as if they had nothing to fear.

From whence you see, Christians, that your faith and salvation depend very much upon that disposition with which you hear the Gospel. If you are serious and concerned in good earnest for your salvation, it will

<sup>a</sup> John v. 40.



will be no hard matter to persuade you to look upon the Gospel as the greatest blessing. But, without these dispositions, the Gospel will be a burthen to you; Jesus Christ himself no blessing; nor heaven worth caring for.

You see who they are, who ought to rejoice upon every return of this festival;—who ought to take comfort;—by whom this truth is worthy to be received;—even by all such as are sincere, such as resolve to serve and to please God to the best of their power. Such may be sure of pardon and acceptance, though they have been never so great sinners. All such may and will receive the terms of pardon, and him who has obtained them, with open arms, and with a glad heart; admiring the great goodness of God;

adoring the love of their Redeemer; resolving to live worthy of such mighty favours. And these passions will make us all *cheerful*, without being foolishly vain; *serious*, without being sad and cast down; as sober as Christians, though our hearts are full of joy.

Now, unto Him who had mercy upon us when we were in darkness and under the power of Satan; who took our nature upon him, was born an infant, became subject to the law made for sinners, offered himself a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, and raised up sinful men to the honour of being the children of God: To Him be all honour, and glory, and blessing, and thanksgiving, and power, ascribed by us and by all his faithful servants, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N XVI.

THE DISPOSITIONS NECESSARY TO MAKE JESUS CHRIST AND HIS GOSPEL THE GREATEST OF ALL BLESSINGS.

MALACHI iv. 2.

*Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.\**

**I** MAKE choice of these words, from amongst many other texts of Sacred Scripture declaring the same thing, to shew you,—*What dispositions are necessary to make Jesus Christ and his Gospel appear to be, what they really are, the greatest blessings that God ever bestowed upon mankind.*

It is true, all Christians are ready to own this, and pretend to rejoice, and to be thankful, for so great blessings; when, after all, it is *utterly impossible*, that any man should from his heart *be glad*, when he does not *feel his own misery*; who does not truly apprehend the misery of mankind, *without the blessing of a Redeemer.*

It was for this reason, that the Spirit of God, *before Jesus Christ took our nature upon him*, expressly foretold, who they were to whom the Messiah should preach; who *would*, and who would *not*, receive Him and his doctrine.

For instance, Isaiah lxi. 1, it is said, that God anointed the Messiah “to preach good tidings to the meek,” for they only would receive his message; “to bind up the broken hearted,” for such only would be glad of his help; “to proclaim liberty to the cap-

tives,” for they only who were sensible of their bondage would be glad to be set at liberty. Accordingly; when our Blessed Saviour came amongst men, he invited such only to be his hearers, to whom he knew his doctrine would be acceptable: “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” And when he was blamed for conversing too freely with publicans and sinners, he silenced his adversaries with this reason and answer: “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Why; are not all men, without exception, sinners? Yes. But that which is intimated in these words is this: That there are sinners who are not at all sensible of their *bad condition*; and their condition is the more deplorable for that: while such as are truly sensible of their own ailments are very thankful for help, and readily comply with the advice of such as can help them. And therefore, when a certain publican, to testify the *sincerity of his repentance*, resolved to part with his estate rather than not do every body *right* that he had before *wronged*, Jesus Christ assures him, that his having been a

\* See Isaiah lxi. 1. Acts xiii. 26, 48. Matth. xi. 28. Luke iv. 8, v. 31. xix. 10.



greater sinner than ordinary will be no hindrance to his salvation: "For the Son of Man (saith he) is come to seek and to save that which is lost;" that is, such as out of a sense of their misery apply to Him for health and salvation.

In short; wherever the Gospel was preached, whether to Jews or Gentiles, "as many as were ordained to (that is, disposed for) eternal life, believed." As many as feared God, and were in fear for themselves, and trembled to hear of a judgment to come, all such believed, became Christians in good earnest, and thought it a great blessing that they could be delivered from their fears upon the conditions the Gospel proposed.

By this time you perceive the meaning of the text, which I have brought all these Scriptures to explain: "Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings." That is; to all that truly fear God, and are sensible how much they have provoked him by their sins; to such, Jesus Christ, and his Gospel, will both be welcome, and a blessing; whilst all the proud, (as it is in the verse going before the text) such as do wickedly, fearing no evil, shall be burnt as a stubble.

So that the plain meaning and design of all these Scriptures is, to shew how men must be disposed to receive Jesus Christ, and his Gospel, to any saving purposes. For it is but too sure, that there are an infinite number of people, to whom Jesus Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, is preached, who notwithstanding continue in darkness; and though he comes with healing in his wings, yet they perish for want of being disposed to be saved. "To you that fear God, (saith the Prophet) he will arise with healing in his wings." "Whosoever among you feareth God, (say the Apostles,) to you is the word of this salvation sent." The fear of God, therefore, is the foundation of saving faith.

People may profess Christianity, and be no gainers by it in the end; they may be called Christians, before they know the duties or the blessings of the Gospel; and if they have not the fear of God in their hearts, they may live in an outward, formal profession of the Christian religion all their days, and die in a condition not better than that of infidels.

Therefore, it behoves us all, as we value our souls, seriously to consider, and to know,

First; What that fear of God is, and how it is wrought in us, which is so necessary a condition and foundation of saving faith?

Secondly; We shall see, that we have just cause to be afraid, and that the more we know, the more we shall abhor ourselves.

<sup>f</sup> Luke xix. 10. <sup>g</sup> Acts xiv. 48. <sup>h</sup> Acts xiii. 26.

Lastly; That the more we know and abhor ourselves, the sooner will God receive us into favour, and the more cautious we shall ever after be of losing his favour.

And these shall be the particulars, which, by God's help, I shall now explain to you.

I. We will first consider what this fear of God is, and how it is wrought in us, which is the condition and foundation of saving faith.

And first, we must be careful not to mistake the fear of man for the fear of God. Human laws, fear of shame, of reproach, and many other worldly considerations, may restrain a man from crimes that other people are guilty of; and yet, such a man may be an utter stranger to the fear of God. Whereas such as truly fear God are not led thereto by any earthly consideration whatever; but they have seriously considered their own great corruption, and God's infinite purity; their own sad deserts, and God's severe justice; they cannot but acknowledge the justice and holiness of his laws; and yet they find in themselves an unwillingness to obey them. They are sure that without God's grace they cannot do any thing that is good; and yet they find in themselves a strange backwardness even to ask that favour and assistance. They know, that they live upon his bounty, and yet they cannot find in their hearts to be thankful. These are both instances of great disorder, and must needs make them liable to God's displeasure. They profess to believe "that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good;" and yet they are apt to sin as presumptuously as if they were indeed hid from his sight. They hear how severely he threatens those that transgress his laws. They have seen his judgments upon other sinners, and they know not how soon it may be their own case.

All these are real occasions of fear; and this fear is greatly increased, when they consider how unable they are to help themselves. They cannot fly from his presence; they dare not stand upon their innocency; they see that sorrow and tears, and asking forgiveness, will not prevail with an earthly judge to pardon criminals, when their crimes are only against men like themselves; and why should they suppose that God will not avenge the presumptuous breach of his own laws, and affronts against his Divine Majesty?

And not only their fears are increased by these considerations, but their sorrows likewise, by considering the happiness of heaven, which they were made capable of enjoying; and knowing at the same time, how unworthy they have made themselves of such mighty favours.

Now; people that are under such convictions of guilt, under such fears, under such concern



concern for their everlasting welfare, (as all people must be who lay things to heart;) such people will be glad to hear, that God will forgive them upon any terms;—they will thankfully own his great goodness, and resolve to comply with what *he* is pleased to appoint, in order to their restoration to favour;—they will be afraid of losing his favour again, by any wilful neglect of their duty;—and, when through frailty they have done amiss, they will most heartily bewail their misfortune and faults: And by such *dispositions* as these, they become fit objects of God's mercy in Jesus Christ. For it was to people *thus affected* and *thus disposed*, that Jesus Christ spoke, when he said, "Come unto me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." And indeed it is purely for want of such dispositions as these, that the Gospel is preached without effect; that Jesus Christ, and salvation through faith in him, is offered *even to us Gentiles*, who before were in darkness, and in the shadow of death; and we scarce esteem it a favour, because we are not sensible of the sad estate we are in without *the blessing of a Redeemer*.

For as a man, who feels his disorder, and knows that he is in danger without the help of a physician, cannot possibly be easy till he has done what he can to save himself from death, and will be truly thankful when help is offered him; so surely should *we* be, did we but well understand the danger we are in.

And if people can be always easy, and can pass their days without fear and concern for what may come hereafter, it is a most sure sign they neither know themselves, nor know *what is to be hereafter*.

This then is the spring of all our misery: We are in danger, and do not know it;—we are sick, and do not perceive it;—we are in the way of ruin, and yet fear no evil. And while it is *thus* with us, no wonder that Jesus Christ and his Gospel are *preached*, and *recommended*, and *pressed* upon us, without any visible effect upon our *faith* or *lives*.

How necessary, then, must a discourse be which *will shew us to ourselves*? It may be uneasy to flesh and blood to have our weakness and miseries laid open; but it is a most necessary work; our health and welfare depend upon it. I shall, therefore, in the next place shew,

II. *That we are far from being safe; that we have indeed cause to be afraid; and the more we know, the more we shall abhor ourselves.*

That man was created in the image of God; that is, in *righteousness* and *true holiness*;—that he has lost *that image*, by his

<sup>b</sup> Ephes. iv. 24.

*infidelity* and *disobedience*;—that all men, from that day to this, are extremely corrupt before God, having *their understanding darkened*; <sup>1</sup> *their heart full of all uncleanness*; <sup>2</sup> all their members prepared for wickedness, whenever a temptation comes in the way;—that being *children of disobedience*,<sup>3</sup> they are, in a great measure, governed by the spirits and powers of darkness; out of whose power it is impossible ever to recover ourselves, by any thing we can do, without the grace of God.

These are truths which the Spirit of God has made known to us, that we may know what we are, and what we must expect, if we die in this condition; and that, if the image of God is not renewed in us during our continuance here on earth, we shall have our portion, *for ever*, with those spirits which kept *not their first estate*, who are therefore "reserved in everlasting chains, unto the judgment of the great day."

This, God has been pleased to make known to us, in order to *awaken* us, that we may consider, and see, and feel, the disorders we labour under, and what it will end in, if we are not careful of ourselves.

But you will say, all people are not thus perverse and wicked, and in this wretched and sad condition. No: Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ, all men are not actually so; but then it is owing to the *fear of God*, by which they have been converted, by which they have been *taken out of the snare of the devil*, who otherwise would have led them captive at his will. For, that all men are by nature enemies to God and goodness, and would all be equally wicked and miserable, if not some way or other restrained, is plain from our very children, whom we are obliged to chastise and punish, even as soon as they are able to do any thing, to keep them from doing mischief, which, if let alone, would end in their destruction. The seeds of all manner of wickedness is in them, and these would all appear and grow up, if we did not weed them out, and root them up by a careful discipline.

And this, God knows, is but too often, by experience, made manifest; where children have been left to themselves, and the seeds of all manner of villainy, which were naturally in them, have been suffered to grow to perfection. The very first thing that appears in them is, an aversion to every thing that is good. No sooner can they speak plain, but they are apt to lie. The first use of their reason generally appears in cunning, and tricks that do not bespeak a simplicity which one could wish in them. From these faults,

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Mark vii. 21.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. iii. 13.

<sup>4</sup> Eph. ii. 2.



they follow their inclinations to greater, till at last they commit all iniquity with greediness, and bring upon themselves destruction both of soul and body.

And I beseech you consider, that this is not the case of *this* or *that* wicked person; for we are all of the same *make* and *frame* of spirit; we have all the same seeds of corruption within us, and it is the grace of God, that any one man is better than another.

Whoever looks into the world, or into his own heart, must own this; he must see that nature is *strangely corrupt*, when people must be forced by laws and punishments to do what all men own is *fit to be done*;—when the duties of religion are looked upon as a *burthen*;—when men can pray with indifference for the pardon of their sins, for the favour of God, and for an happy life after death;—when we know what we ought to do, and own that it is reasonable, and yet must struggle hard with ourselves, before we can consent to do what we inwardly approve of.

All these are sure signs of *a bad condition*; and it is necessary that we should *know this*, and be often put in mind of the danger we are in, that being convinced how miserable our condition is, we may give no rest to ourselves, till, by the grace of God, we have found out a way to escape.

And this brings us to the last part of our discourse:

III. *That the more sensible we are of our own unworthiness, the more we abhor ourselves, the sooner will God receive us into favour, and the more cautious we shall ever after be of losing his favour.* “Surely, (saith the Psalmist)<sup>a</sup> “his salvation is nigh them that fear him.”

It has been always observed by those that take notice of God’s providences, that God, for the most part, *then* interposes, when things are come to extremity, and when men have no hopes of help from any thing they themselves can do.

It was just thus, when our blessed Saviour took our nature upon him, and manifested himself to the world. The Jews knew by the *Law* what sin was, and what it deserved. The rest of the world knew, by what their own consciences suggested, that sin stuck close to them; and those that were serious feared what might follow. And this perplexity of mind, in which the Gospel found men, made it very acceptable, and more readily to be embraced; and they received with thankfulness a dispensation so full of goodness, which *assured* them—of *pardon* upon their repentance; of *grace* to renew their nature; and of *eternal happiness* after this

life, to all such as should endeavour to purify themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.

Indeed, there were people then (as there are now many) who were under no apprehensions of danger; who lived at all adventures, and feared no evil, or who had an high opinion of their own goodness; and these, as the Scriptures inform us, “rejected “the counsel of God,” and his offers of mercy.

And is not the case the same at this day? Are not people in as much danger now? Have not they the very tokens of sin and damnation upon them? And yet are as easy as if they were to be saved without any concern of their own. Pray hear what God declares, by his Prophet: “To this man will “I look,” [that is, in mercy] “even to him “that is poor, and of a contrite heart, and “trembleth at my word.”

And why are these dispositions necessary to obtain the favour of God in Jesus Christ? The reasons are plain: *First*; that men, reflecting upon the misery of their condition, may truly value the favour of their deliverance. *Secondly*; that the power of God may appear in the conversion of sinners, who had no power to help themselves. *Thirdly*; that those who have felt the burthen of a troubled conscience, and have been once truly afraid of the wrath of God, may ever after walk more circumspectly. And *lastly*; that, being truly sensible of the danger they have escaped, the duties of religion, which are otherwise uneasy to flesh and blood, may be more cheerfully embraced.

And now, you see how necessary it is, that we should be convinced of the misery of our condition, and of our own inability to help ourselves, before we can even be disposed to look upon the Gospel as a real blessing, much less receive it with that joy and thankfulness which so great a favour requires. You see how people come to differ; some *believing*, and others *slighting*, the very same truths. The plain account of which is, that that some fear God, and are afraid for themselves, and are concerned for what may come hereafter; while others live at all adventures, and fear no evil, nor are they concerned to prevent it.

Hence it appears, that it is not always for want of reasons that men do not believe, but very often from an unwillingness to *receive the truth*. Therefore Jesus Christ is said to be a *stumbling-block*, because men of wicked lives and principles could not receive his doctrine. “Hearing, ye shall hear, and “not understand,” because of their *obstinacy*, *pride*, *worldly-mindedness*, &c. Now; this the

<sup>a</sup> Ps. lxxxv. 9.

<sup>o</sup> Isaiah lxvi. 2.



Scripture assures us,<sup>a</sup> was *their condemnation*, which could not have been, unless the will of God had been sufficiently made known to them, so as that a well-disposed person might have easily perceived it.

And the conclusion of all will be, that nothing in nature is so proper to beget a true faith in Jesus Christ as a true and lively sense of our condition,—a feeling and an assurance that things are most wretchedly amiss with us. For when we are once indeed convinced, that our sins make us altogether unworthy of God's favour;—that our weakness, without his grace, will expose us to all manner of wickedness;—that our sins make us liable to a severe account, which, unless his mercy interposes, will sink us into everlasting ruin;—why then, Jesus Christ will be thought a blessing, because *he* only can cure us of these fears,—*he* only can help our infirmities;—*he* only can teach and enable us to please God while we live, and make death a blessing to us when we die.

In one word; *he* only can cure all our fears, except such as are necessary to keep us awake, and ease all our burdens.

After all, I beseech you do not imagine that the only end of Christ's coming into the

<sup>a</sup> John iii. 19.

world was to ease us of our fears. For, assuredly, one great end of his taking our nature upon him was, to free the world from wickedness, and that blindness and gross ignorance which occasioned it. "For this purpose, (saith St. John, iii. 8.) was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."

Whoever are not disposed to let the Gospel have *this effect* upon them, "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God," will have no reason to rejoice that the Gospel is preached unto them; which contains threatenings, and much severer punishments, than ever the Law of Nature could suggest, or the Law of Moses made mention of. *Weeping*, and *wailing*, and *gnashing of teeth*, for ever and ever, are punishments not to be spoken of, not to be thought of, without fear and trembling.

God Almighty fill all our hearts with such an holy fear of his judgments, that we may look upon the Gospel as a blessing, since by it we are shewn a way to escape, and enabled to work out our own salvation, through Jesus Christ our Saviour.

To whom, &c. be glory both now and for ever. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N XVII.

THE DUTY OF THE MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL, AND THE UNHAPPY STATE OF THOSE WHO HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

O GOD, terrible in judgment, how ought I to tremble, when I undertake to persuade others to fear thy displeasure, when the knowledge of thy word and judgments have had so little effect upon myself. Pardon, O merciful God, this sinful security in myself, and all that preach thy word, and in all that shall hear us; and enable us so effectually to persuade others, both by our life and sermons, that it is an evil thing and bitter to be under thy displeasure; that seeing our danger, and feeling our misery, and the disease we labour under, we may thankfully embrace the means which thy goodness has provided for our recovery, and joyfully close with that gracious invitation of thy Blessed Son—"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Grant this, for his sake, O Blessed God. *Amen.*

2 COR. V. 11.

*Knowing the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.\**

**T**HERE never, sure, was a time more necessary to set the terrors of the Lord before men, *than this*, when the generality of those who call themselves Christians either do not know, or have forgotten, for what end they came into the world;—how they ought to live in it;—or what is like to become of them when they go out of it.

Now; as the necessity of persuading people to be more concerned for themselves is very great, so are the reasons made use of by the Spirit of God the most *terrible* and the most *awakening*. What are they? We find them in the verse before the text, and they are these: "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that every one

\* See Isaiah lxi. 1. lxvi. 2. Pf. xxxiv. 18. xc. 11. cxix. 120. Eccles. xii. 4. Matth. xi. 28. Luke xii. 5. John vii. 37. Phil. ii. 12. Gal. v. 19. James ii. 19.

"may



"may receive the things done in his body," that is, in this life, "according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." Which the Son of God, who is to be the judge of the world, explains in these very words, "All that are in the graves shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.*

You see, Christians, who those are that are supposed in an especial manner to know this terror of the Lord. They are the Ministers of Jesus Christ. You hear also whence they have this knowledge of God's purpose, to call all men to an account, even from the Son of God himself, who came down from heaven to make this known unto men, in order to save them from ruining themselves.

I pray you, therefore, take notice, brethren, that the words we make use of to awaken, to persuade, and to convince you, are not the arguments of sinful men like yourselves; for they are the arguments of God himself, the God of Truth and Mercy, who would have all men to know, and savingly to believe, these truths, that they may be happy for ever, and that they may escape eternal misery.

Our duty, as Ministers of Jesus Christ, in the first place, is, ourselves to be thoroughly convinced of the great importance of these dreadful truths, that we may be better able and disposed to convince and persuade others, what an evil thing and bitter it is to forsake the Lord, and forget these important truths:—That we and you must all give an account to God;—that we shall be judged according to our works;—and that this is the only time in which we are to provide for that great account.

And indeed, if these truths will not persuade both us, and you, to consider what we have to do, and to live like people who hope to be able to give a comfortable account of themselves, we shall be ruined, as sure as these are the words of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.

To oblige us to do our duty faithfully, the Spirit of God makes use of this as the strongest reason and argument, "They (that is, the Ministers of Christ) do watch for your souls, as they that must give an account." A consideration so very terrible, that it is enough to make the best of God's Ministers to tremble, as often as they consider what they have undertaken, and the account, the great account, they have to give, not only for themselves and their own actions; but because they stand charged and are accountable for others.

\* John v. 29.

\* Heb. xiii. 17.

And, O! that God would communicate to us all, such a degree of concern, of grace, and zeal, as is necessary for the work we have undertaken, and the account we have to give!

We should then never cease to put you in mind of the account which you, as well as we, have to give, when we are to leave this world; and the dreadful hazard they all run, who defer their repentance, and who are not careful to bring forth fruits meet for repentance, and answerable to amendment of life.

Let me therefore beg of you all, (who understand me) to consider the following truths, which I am going to lay before you; that being by them awakened out of that deadly sleep and indifference into which Satan has cast the unthinking world, we may look about us, and see where it will end at the last. *Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men.* To what would we persuade them? Why, first of all, to give credit to the God that made them, who has made himself, and his will and purposes, known unto men, by HIS SPIRIT, by HIS WORD, and by HIS ONLY SON.

For instance; he has represented himself as a God merciful, long-suffering, plenteous in goodness, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth, and be saved. On the other hand, he has declared, that such as obey not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness, such as neglect or despise his goodness, his will and commands, and the means of grace and salvation which he has appointed;—he has declared, that all such shall find him a God terrible in judgment.

Sure, nobody expects that the Ministers of Christ should go about to prove these things:—*That we must all appear before the Judgment-seat of Christ;—that every man shall then receive according to what he has done in this life, whether it has been good or evil;—that the wicked shall then be sent into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.* There can be no greater proof than that THE SON OF GOD has declared this.

What then have the Ministers of Christ to do? Why; to endeavour to persuade men, by that love which every man ought to have for his own soul, to think how he will be able to answer, in the first place, for the crime of not believing the Son of God, whom God sent into the world to make his will known unto men. This (believe it, Christians) will be found to be no small crime; HE THAT BELIEVETH NOT SHALL BE DAMNED. These are not our words, but the very words of the Son of God.

\* Mark xvi. 16.



You will say, perhaps, all Christians do believe the Gospel. Would to God we all did believe as we ought to do! But, to believe is not enough to justify us before God, unless our faith obliges us to live as becomes Christians.

To love, to fear, and to glorify God; to be sober, chaste, and temperate; to be just and charitable to men; and after all, which is the perfection of saving faith, to confess before God, that when we have done all these things, it is all owing to the mere mercy of God, to his grace, his assistance, and to the merits of Jesus Christ and his intercession, that God will accept and reward our faith, and our poor endeavours to please him. This is the case and consequence of a true and saving faith.

I will set before you the fruits of an unprofitable faith—the faith of too many pretended Christians, who know the Gospel, but live as if not one word of it were true; who make light of sins of the most damning nature; who will not be persuaded to fear the wrath of God, till they shall feel it to their everlasting sorrow.

Now, to awaken and terrify such unhappy sinners as hold the truth in unrighteousness, the Lord Jesus himself hath given us the very sentence that shall be passed upon such, when he shall come to judge the world in justice; “Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.” A sentence so frightful, that no one can hardly repeat it without trembling, who ever would but say to himself, what if this should be the sentence to be passed upon myself!

Now, this is the sentence, which shall most surely be passed upon every sin unrepented of; such as, *injustice, fraud, oppression, and covetousness*, which is the root of these and many other evils. This will be the cursed end of all unlawful pleasures, of *adultery, fornication, and drunkenness*, which too often leads to these. This will be the reward of living in malice, envy, and hatred. This is what will be got, by all unlawful ways of getting estates, of cunning and cheating bargains. This will be the end of dishonouring God, his name, his word, and sacraments. In short, this will be the dreadful punishment of *hypocrisy*, of pretending to be Christians without Christianity.

These truths being as sure as the God who hath declared them, what is it which makes so many go on in a careless way of living, as if there were no truth in them? Why; either they do not know what a dreadful thing it is to be a sinner, and under the displeasure of God, or what will certainly be the punishment of sin unrepented of;—or they resolve to repent before they die;—or

they depend upon the mercy of God, and hope he will not be so severe as he has threatened;—or that they shall fare no worse than other people;—or, lastly, that it is in vain to hope for pardon, their sins have been so great, and so long continued in. All these, God knows, are sad delusions.

Sin is not so light a matter as Christians are apt to think. It was the occasion of the loss of Paradise to our first parents;—it was what provoked the justice of God to drown a wicked world; and, after that, to destroy a number of cities by fire from heaven.

And, to shew his hatred of sin, and to make men dread it, he has made known to us, that he spared not a race of creatures higher than the highest on earth, but cast those very angels that sinned into hell, where he has declared, that all such as follow them in their rebellion shall with them be doomed to their punishment.

These frightful truths are recorded in Scripture, to awaken us;—to make men afraid of Sin, and of ruining themselves by it; and are proper to shake the most careless, the proudest, the stubbornest sinner, who is not given over to a reprobate mind.

And I have repeated them, to put you and myself in mind, to consider what we have to do; not to make light of sin, which cost Jesus Christ his life and blood; and that any who have been so unhappy as hitherto to have lived in sin, in any known sin, may see what it will certainly end in, if not forsaken and repented of. As also, to put every one of us upon thinking what is like to be our case a few years hence, when with respect to us the world will be at an end, and “when the night will come when no man can work.” And lastly, when we must give an account to God, how we lived in this state of trial; what good, and what evil, we have done; when Satan will be ready to accuse us; when our own conscience will tell us what he saith is true; when we cannot say with truth that we had made our peace with God before we left this world; and when we shall have nothing to say, but to stand speechless, expecting a sentence which is dreadful even to be repeated.

When this shall be the case, as most surely it will, of every one who lives and dies in sin; it will then be too late to wish that they had hearkened to the Ministers of God, when they would have persuaded them to consider, before it was too late, the anguish of a soul that shall find itself shut out of heaven, and sentenced to a misery that shall last for ever.

I know what every one who hears this will be apt to say to himself, *God forbid that this should ever be my case!* and to be sure every Christian will say *Amen*. But then, whoever



hopes that this may not be his own case; must suffer himself to be persuaded, and to believe, that his future and everlasting state of happiness or misery will certainly be according to his faith in God, and the manner of the life he leads in this world, where we all have our time and state of trial.

And now, my Christian brethren, I take it for granted, that so many as have heard these truths with seriousness will be touched with some degree and sense of the danger they may possibly be liable to. And such a concern may, through the grace of God, lead them to enquire, whether they have been Christians in name only, and not in deed and in truth; or, to speak plainly, whether they are in the way of *salvation or damnation*.

These are *two words* of the greatest concern to every man who is in his right mind. For (and a sad truth it is) very many there are who are not so, *who are given over to a reprobate mind*, to a mind void of judgment; who, having hardened themselves in sin, so as to be *past feeling*, as the Apostle speaks,\* are not terrified with words of the greatest dread and thoughtfulness to such whose conscience is awake, who are afraid for themselves, and for the account they must one day give to God, the searcher of hearts.

Where now shall a person who labours under these fears, where shall he seek for help;—where may he hope to find comfort;—who shall deliver such a wretched man from a condition worse than death? St. Paul has answered this question. It is *the grace, the mercy of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord*, which alone can deliver us from this bondage. To Him, God the Father has committed the care of the souls of men; he has paid the price of their redemption by his most precious blood. And, to convince sinners how much he pities the sad condition and danger they have brought themselves into, he hath made this following most kind and merciful invitation to every son and daughter of Adam:† “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

Here is, Christians, as gracious an invitation as ever was made to man. All that are in pain and fear, on account of their former sins;—all that are sensible of their former defects and back-slidings;—all that are sensible that, of themselves, they want power to overcome the corruption of their nature;—all that sincerely desire to please God, and to avoid every thing that may displease him;—in short, *all, all without exception*, even the greatest sinners, are invited, with a sure promise of a remedy for all the evils they feel

or fear. For no less a physician, no less a person than the Son of God, inviteth, and hath promised to relieve and help them.

But, O Jesus! how few are there, when we look into the world, how few are there, who are sensible that they want thy help! How few who apply to Thee for help, as they ought to do!

We do not speak of those who live without God in the world;—who despise the Gospel of Christ, and the salvation offered in it;—who make a mock of sin and of hell;—for these are plainly given over to a mind void of judgment: And it is no wonder, that this merciful invitation of Jesus Christ doth not affect them,—nobody expects it from them.

But what shall we say, when the generality of Christians, such as pretend to hope for salvation, do not appear to be much concerned in this gracious invitation? So few being convinced that they stand in need of a Redeemer, of pardon, of help to do their duty, of grace to please God; infinite, therefore, are the number, even of the professors of Christianity, who seem not to be much concerned in this invitation of the only Saviour of the world.

The reason is this: None are concerned to look out for help, but such as are sensible they want help: “They that are whole, (saith our Lord) need not a physician, but they that are sick.” “I came not (saith he) to call the righteous,” such as think themselves safe, “but sinners, to repentance.”

And indeed it is with the diseases of our souls, as it is with those of our bodies. If we feel little or no pain, we are not much concerned; and yet a dead palsy, or a lethargy, are as mortal as a wound that makes us feel smart, and gives us pain. Thus it is with regard to the diseases of the soul. And it is certainly one of the heaviest of God’s judgments for a man not to be afraid for himself.

It concerns, therefore, every man to know what reason he has to be afraid for himself, and to know that he stands in need of help. This was the case of the church of Laodicea;‡ “Thou say’st that thou art rich, and wantest nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” This is a *sad case*, and yet it is the case (God knows) of too many Christians, as appears plainly by that great unconcernedness to be seen in the lives of Christians; who generally satisfy themselves, and place their hopes of safety and happiness, in being free from scandalous sins, such as the magistrate would punish;—in

\* Eph. iv. 19.

† Matth. xi. 28.

‡ Rev. iii. 17.



observing the outward duties of Christianity, such as the most unconverted person may perform, without being sensible of the bondage of sin, and that their religion must mend their corrupt nature before they die, or they must never expect to be saved.

It was in order to awaken such as would attend, and to prevent such delusions, that you were, in the first part of this discourse, put in mind of the account we must all give, how we have spent our lives here, and of the happiness or misery that *will* certainly follow such an account.

And this was done, in order to persuade you, every man for himself, to endeavour to work out his salvation with fear and trembling; that is, with a concern of one whose soul is at stake; that you may be prepared to hearken to the invitation of Jesus Christ to make you happy.

“To this man, (saith God) will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” A true sense and confession of our misery will, you see, move the pity of God; a deep sense of our own weakness, and inability to help ourselves, will engage his power to assist us; and a sense of our own unworthiness will move his compassion.

Whoever, therefore, among you feareth God, to you is this invitation of Jesus Christ made; “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” So that it will be our own fault entirely, if we are not freed from all our fears of perishing eternally; if we have not all the assistance that our hearts can desire, to bring us to heaven and happiness everlasting.

Let us therefore consider, what it is to go to Christ. It is to believe him to be the Son of God, sent by his Father, out of pity to his poor creatures, to deliver them out of slavery and bondage, into which they were most miserably fallen. It is to become his disciples;—to receive him as our *Teacher*, in making known to us the will of God for our salvation. It is to receive him as our *Priest*, who hath reconciled us to God, by offering up himself a sacrifice, to satisfy the Divine Justice, and who is continually making intercession for all such as go unto God by him. And lastly, it is to acknowledge him as our *Lord and King*; that as such we are to obey his laws, and suffer him to rule and govern us.

All, therefore, who will effectually close with this gracious invitation of Jesus Christ, must receive Him, as our *Lord*, to govern us by his Gospel;—as our only *Mediator*, to

prevail with God for our pardon;—and as our only *Redeemer*, who laid down his life for us.

You see, my Christian brethren, the gracious methods which God has made use of, to awaken us, and to raise in our minds a spirit of fear, by letting us know, that we are to give an account for all the things we have done in the body, whether they have been good or bad; to the end that we may more gladly hearken to the merciful invitation of Jesus Christ—who knows the exceeding danger we are in without his help; and our souls being precious in his sight, he therefore most kindly invites us to come to him, for light, for direction, for help, and salvation. And he has graciously promised to give rest and peace to all that come to him, and are sensible of their wants and danger. He will convince them, that he has made their peace with God. He will assist them by his Spirit, so that sin shall not get dominion over them. And he will intercede with God, to grant us that happiness for which we were at first created.

*I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger for ever: only acknowledge thine iniquities, and that thou hast transgressed against the Lord.*<sup>b</sup> This is the language of God to sinners:—A broken and a contrite heart He will not despise.

What now is required on our part to make this gracious invitation of Christ a perfect blessing to us? Why, to believe in Him with all our heart; for whoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.

But then this faith must be such as shall purify our hearts; such as shall lead us to repentance; such as shall bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

And this faith, being the gift of God, must be begged of him with the earnestness of a soul that is weary and heavy laden, and such shall most certainly find rest unto their souls.

In one word; our great and only comfort is, in all our *troubles*, after all our *miscarriages*, under all our *fears*, that we have a SAVIOUR to go to, who even invites us to come to him. A *Saviour*, who came down from heaven to seek and to save his lost creatures. A *Saviour*, who has redeemed us by his precious blood;—who has made our peace with God;—who is at the right hand of God, making intercession for us;—who invites all, none excepted, to come to him;—and to whom none ever did go, as they ought to do, but found rest unto their souls.

But it must be Thou, O Jesus, who came to seek and to save those that were lost and

<sup>a</sup> Isaiah lxvi. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Jer. iii. 12.



gone astray;—it must be Thou, O Lord, who dost so graciously invite us, who must lead us to thyself, or we shall surely miss the way.

Direct, gracious Lord, all such as desire to come to Thee. As Thou givest them a will, be Thou their guide, their light, and their support, till they come to Thee, and to that inheritance which Thou hast prepared

for all those that obey thy kind invitation. And this we beg—for thy promise sake; for thy mercy's sake; and for the sake of that love which Thou hast had for our souls.

For which all glory, and praise, and thanks, be ascribed to Thee, together with the Father and the Holy Ghost, by us and by all thy faithful servants, for ever and ever. Amen.

## S E R M O N XVIII.

### THE DESIGN AND HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY.

O Blessed Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners, direct and guide me by thy good Spirit, that in this and all my labours for the instruction of my Flock, I may set forth the Mercy, the Glory, and the Goodness of God, and that by so doing, I may save myself, and those that hear me,

I TIM. i. 15. TIT. ii. 14. I TIM. iv. 1.

*Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners:—And gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, [that is, a people peculiarly consecrated to him] zealous of good works.—Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; and [Jude 4.] turning the grace of God into lasciviousness.*

**W**HAT I would now recommend to your serious consideration, are these following particulars:—*First*, the great and merciful design of the Christian Religion. *Secondly*, how sadly, and by what means, this gracious design of God has been hindered or perverted. *Lastly*, what is like to be the consequence of this sad apostacy to Christians of all denominations; and how every Christian may contribute towards restoring Christianity to its great design of saving sinners.

Now; the Design of Christianity, the Apostle tells us, is, *to save sinners*, and that *Jesus Christ came into the world for that very end*. And that the only way of saving them was, *by redeeming them from all iniquity*: forasmuch as all mankind were slaves to the devil, and to his temptations,—to the world, and its wicked customs,—and to their own corrupt inclinations. Jesus Christ therefore came to redeem them from *this slavery*, and from eternal misery and death; and to gain to himself a people who should be consecrated in a peculiar manner to his service;—and that being purified by an holy life, and good

works, they might be capable of heaven and of eternal happiness.

This was the great design of God in sending his Son into the world. And happy would it have been, if this gracious design had been universally closed with, and had not been perverted by the weakness of men, and by the wiles of the devil.

The Spirit of God foresaw this, and, by his Apostle, gives Christians warning of it, and that, “in the latter times, men shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; turning the grace of God into lasciviousness;” that is, accommodating and suiting the doctrine of the Gospel to the corrupt inclinations of men.

We shall see, in the History of Christianity which I shall set before you, how these seducing spirits have succeeded in all ages, in this attempt; that Christians may beware of falling into the snare of the devil, and may be careful to have the true design of the Christian religion always in their eye; which is, *to make men holy, that they may be happy*.

<sup>b</sup> See Matth. vii. 16, 22. xv. 9. 1 Cor. x. 12. 2 Pet. iii. 3. Gal. i. 4. Rev. ii. 5.



All men being by nature *sinners*, as such God could take no pleasure in them. Man had passed through several states of trial before the publishing of the Gospel by Jesus Christ;—in a state of Innocence before the Fall;—in the state of Nature after the Fall, with all the advantages of reason and free-will;—and lastly, under the Law, with all the helps of outward ordinances. And the conclusion always was, as the Apostle observes both of Gentiles and Jews, “They were altogether abominable, there was none good.”

Almighty God, therefore, whose justice could not let wickedness go unpunished, and whose infinite goodness would not let his poor creatures be lost, in his good time SENT HIS OWN BELOVED SON INTO THE WORLD, to save sinners out of this sad condition.

In order to this great and merciful design, his Son took our nature upon him, and in that nature fulfilled the whole will of God. He set us an example, how we must live so as to please God; and, to satisfy the justice of God, he suffered that death which every man living has for his own sins deserved. And, lastly, he left us his Gospel, as a rule to live by, and sent his Holy Spirit from heaven, to supply his place on earth, and to assist and conduct his faithful servants to heaven.

THUS JESUS CHRIST CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS; and few, or none, but *sinners*, received him or his doctrine; that is, such whose hearts God had touched, and filled with a salutary fear for themselves, and a concern to know whether God would accept of a sinner’s repentance; which was a question the Jews themselves did not know how to resolve, there being no sacrifice appointed in the Law for great and crying sins. And as for the Heathens, they knew nothing at all of it.

Jesus Christ, and He only, could give sinners full satisfaction in this matter: for he came from God;—his works shewed that he did so;—he knew the mind of God, for he was his beloved Son;—and he assured mankind, that God would accept of the sincere repentance of the greatest sinner, would not only pardon what was past, but would receive him into favour, and treat him as if he had never done amiss.

This was most welcome news to such as were weary and heavy laden with the burden of their sins. And for such as were in no fear for themselves, nor under any concern for what must come hereafter; to awaken them, He made known such important truths as these:—That there is a life after death, and a life that is to last for ever;—that good souls will be made happy, and that wicked souls will be punished to all eternity.

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Now; this discovery of what must come hereafter startled all such as had any sort of seriousness. They saw plainly that die they must, and in a very short time; and that if what Jesus Christ did assure them was true, they had no choice but either to be happy or miserable, and that for ever.

And that which increased their fears was, that they found in their very nature an aversion, and a disability, to do such good works as were necessary to intitle them to happiness;—and a proneness to evil continually, which must of necessity subject them to misery.

Here Jesus Christ and his Gospel came in to their relief; for he gave them the utmost assurance, that upon their consecrating themselves to God, God would give them a Spirit, which should change their hearts, their thoughts, their desires, for the better,—a Spirit, which should enable them to believe, and to do, such things as by nature they had neither a will nor a power to do; and that after that, it would be their own fault if they came short of eternal happiness, and if they escaped not eternal misery.

It was upon these motives that people at first became Christians. They were baptized, and received that Holy Spirit which Jesus Christ had promised, whereby they were enlightened in their understandings, and enabled to do and to suffer whatever the Gospel required of them, and to run all hazards in this world, rather than lose the happiness they hoped for, or be liable to the misery they feared in the next.

And this was to them another proof of the truth of the Gospel, that had wrought such a change in them for the better, which neither their own reason, nor all the rules of the wise men of the world, were able to effect.

For they found, by an happy experience, that they could renounce such pleasures as were inconsistent with a christian life, though grateful to flesh and blood. They became serious and thoughtful how to please God; and every day more unconcerned for such things as the rest of the world doted on. They were charitable and kind to one another. They suffered losses and persecutions with patience, as men believing that such things are not to be accounted of in comparison of heaven and hell.

In short; all that became Christians upon such motives as these, (that is, of the necessity of being holy in order to be happy) all such became holy, and exemplary for all worthy actions. They were peaceable in their lives, chaste in their conversation, just in their dealings, constant in their devotions, and zealous for the honour of God. They

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abhorred the wicked courses of the world, such as *whoredom*, and *drunkenness*; *lying*, *perjury*, and *covetousness*; and all other crimes, which they were assured, by Jesus Christ and his Gospel, would shut them out of heaven. And if there were any amongst them, who, forgetting the design of Christianity, fell into crimes unworthy of the Christian name, they were immediately turned out of the Christian society, by the strict and godly discipline of those days, until they should give sober proofs of their amendment.

This was the state of the Christian religion for the first three hundred years after Christ's ascension into heaven; during which time, it spread itself over the face of the whole known world.

And this it did, notwithstanding its *doctrines* and *commands* were directly opposite to the corrupt nature and prejudices of mankind, and to all the religions and corrupt usages of the world.

And this was another proof of the truth of Christianity,—that it should (as our Lord foretold) be preached and received in all the world;—that it should be received without any outward force to compel men, without any countenance of great and learned men to persuade them, without any prospect of worldly interest to induce them to embrace it.

And one thing is here fit to be observed, because it is a confirmation of a truth which Jesus Christ very often told his followers;—That *riches*, and worldly *powers*, and great *authority*, were great hindrances to the receiving his Gospel. And accordingly, St. Paul takes notice,<sup>c</sup> “That not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were called.” It being very hard to flesh and blood, to renounce the love of riches, the esteem of learning, and the pleasure of authority and power, and to submit to be poor in spirit, to be despised, and thought ignorant for Christ's sake.

And experience still shews us, that what Christianity is left in the world is generally to be found amongst such as want these temptations. It is amongst them we must look for a *trust* in God, a *faith* in his promises, a *submission* to his will, and a conformity to Jesus Christ, *humbled* and made of of no reputation. For, if we go a little higher, we find, too often, either an excessive love for the riches of the world, and for the pleasures they afford; or an excessive pride, a proneness to libertinism, loose principles, or downright infidelity.

But to return to our subject. While men became Christians out of a pure desire *to save*

*their souls*, Christianity was preserved in its purity, and converts were made, more by the holiness of the lives of Christians, than by their learning or other arguments. Till at last, something above three hundred years after Christ, the rulers of the world themselves (many of them) became Christians; and then people, instead of being persecuted or reproached for being Christians, were countenanced, esteemed, and rewarded, for the religion they professed.

And then, we may be assured of it, many became Christians, for *interest*, for *fashion* sake, or out of mere humour, without ever considering what Christianity required of them,—what they promised to believe and do,—or what they should be better or worse for it hereafter.

So that holiness of life, and the saving of their souls, not being what they proposed by becoming Christians, nor the consequence of their being such; the SEDUCING SPIRIT soon took an advantage of this, and led them to dishonour their holy profession. It was then that the prophecy of our Lord<sup>d</sup> was fulfilled: “While men slept, the enemy came, and sowed tares among the wheat,” &c. And this he did, first, *by attacking the faith of Christians*, and introducing all manner of heresies, so that good Christians were distracted, and their zeal for propagating of holiness of life was diverted too much, while they were obliged to defend the very principles of Christianity.

These heats being in some measure abated, and the breaches made up, his next attempt was upon the morals and lives of Christians.

Such as embraced Christianity out of custom were not very careful to live according to its rules and laws; at the same time, they had the Holy Scriptures in their hands, and they had the examples of Christ and his sincere followers before them, which shewed them plainly, that they were not what they should be.

The consequence of this was, that such as were not willing to part with their sins, and to lead a true Christian life, and yet durst not renounce their religion, endeavoured to find out ways to make their minds easy; which they could not well do, whenever they compared their lives with the precepts of the Gospel, which yet they had in their hands.

And this brought a thousand corruptions into the church: Every thing but holiness of life, and renouncing the devil, the world, and the flesh, were greedily embraced.

In these times of ignorance, superstition, and wickedness, it pleased God to open men's

<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. i. 26.

<sup>d</sup> Matth. xiii. 25.



eyes by the Reformation. The Holy Bible was translated into the language of most nations. And would to God the seducing spirit spoken of in the text, and his agents, had not prevailed so far as to cause too many to make a very ill use of the knowledge which they might have had from God's word; but so it is. And many, who know their duty, *do hold the Truth in Unrighteousness*; and too, too many do spend their zeal, and which is generally all the religion they have, in unnecessary disputes.

But what is still more mournful, there is in these days a spirit of *infidelity*, of *libertinism*, and *profaneness*, gone out into the world, which was not known in former ages. And this, not only amongst Protestants; but all good and sober men of the church of Rome make the same sad complaint. That there are some, who, as the Apostle speaks, bring in damnable heresies, denying the Lord that redeemed them. Others who make a mock of all religion, deride the way, and the means of salvation;—profane the name of God after the most astonishing manner;—make a jest of Christ and his ordinances;—do despite to his word, his day, his worship, and his Ministers;—and who are, in all respects, worse than the Pagans, who know not God.

Lastly; there are others, who profess to know and to believe in God, and yet in effect deny him, while they countenance those that despise him and his laws; while they are pleased with the conversation of men that shew no manner of respect for the Lord Jesus, who came into the world to save sinners.

Be assured of it, good Christians, these are agents of those seducing spirits spoken of by the Apostle; and whoever comes near them is in danger of being infected and ruined. For God will not be mocked. If men will *walk in the counsel of the ungodly, and stand in the way of sinners*, God will give them up at last to sit in the seat of the scornful; that is, to arrive at an height of wickedness, which once they were amazed at; and, scorning to be kept within the bounds of religion, they will therefore endeavour to make it ridiculous and contemptible.

And this is the true cause of the corruption both of *faith* and *manners*, which is so justly lamented.

The corrupt nature of man, being desirous to live under as few restraints as possible, first invents ways to keep up the hopes of heaven, without parting with any satisfaction on earth; and so the faith comes to be corrupted.

When that will not do, and men will not part with their sins, nothing but Atheism can make them easy. By Atheism, I mean

such a way of living as obliges them first to *wish*, and then to *say*, THERE IS NO GOD; and so the lives of Christians come to be corrupted. But then how dreadful must their case be, who have nothing to depend on, but the hopes that the Word of God, his promises, and his threatenings, may not be true! This is a sad blindness indeed! But it is the just and natural punishment of a wicked life.

And now you see, in the short history of the Christian Religion which I have given you; you see, how far the Christian world is departed from that concern, that zeal, that piety, and constancy, which animated those that first embraced Christianity. And yet we have the same reasons that *they* had, to be very much concerned for what must become of us when we die.

Were *they* sinners; so are *we*. Had they reason, as sinners, to be afraid for themselves; and have not *we* the same reasons? Are not heaven and hell still in being? Are not these still to be the portion of good and bad men, as each shall deserve? Have not *we* the same hopes, and the same promises, that *they* had? Did not Jesus Christ come into the world to save *us*, as well as them? Is there any other way of being saved, but what they took? That is; to consecrate ourselves to his service, and to be zealous of good works.

Jesus Christ came to redeem us from all iniquity, to deliver us from this present evil world. Is the world less wicked now than it was then? How comes it then that we are so little apprehensive of its snares, and of our own danger?

Shall I tell you the truth, and the secret of this? It is with Christians as it was with the Jews;—they were God's peculiar people;—they took no care to live like people so highly favoured;—God gave them up to their own ways, rejected them from being his people, and from being a nation.

Let us now look at home. People greatly value themselves for being Christians. And because Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, they depend upon *that*; not considering, that some sinners will be saved, and others damned; which makes a very great difference.

They flatter themselves, that their salvation is now in their own hands; and so live like those that have no reason to fear, though they are in the midst of snares.

They see others, even almost all about them, as little concerned as themselves, without considering, that it will be little comfort to be undone with never so much company.

They



They will see no hurt in what Jesus Christ has forbidden, for the very same reason that Eve had to eat the forbidden fruit, *because it pleases their senses.*

Have not Christians some reason to fear some such consequence as the Jews experienced? It was what the Spirit of God has foretold: "Remember from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do thy first works, or else I will remove thy candlestick;" that is, unchurch thee.

This brings us, in the last place, to consider how much every Christian may contribute towards restoring Christianity to its great design of *saving sinners*, which was the great design of *Christ's coming into the world.*

And let us not, good Christians, any of us, pervert, or make void, this design, by building our hopes of salvation upon any thing that is merely external; such as, the bare name of Christians, or an outward conformity to the usages of the church we live in. Always remembering, that true religion cannot consist in any thing which a wicked man can do as well as a good man.

We have seen how others have perverted the design of Christianity, and brought many errors into the church. Would to God, this were only the crime of past ages, and that the present age were not concerned in it! But so it is, and so it will be, while Christians will desire to go to heaven without parting with their sins;—they will seek out, and depend upon, expedients and ways to make their minds easy, which will not profit them in the end.

He who came to save us, *must save us after his own way, by purifying us to himself a peculiar people*; that is, a people consecrated to him after a peculiar manner, not only by outward ceremonies, (which was what the Jews and Heathens depended on for recommending them to God's favour) but by a change of mind and heart. For if we are not very much changed for the better, —if we are not restored to the image of God, in which we were created,—we can never be saved: WITHOUT HOLINESS, without an holy temper, and holy dispositions, NO MAN MUST SEE THE LORD.

We must not only abstain from sin, and do what *custom, or interest, or human laws*, may lead us to; but the Love of God must be the governing principle of our lives. And this must appear in our being *zealous of good works*, in order to please God, and in obedience to his commands.

People of reason and faith will consider, that the *Christian religion, its hopes and fears, its promises and threatenings*, do not depend

• Rev. ii. 5.

upon the opinion of men, but are as *true, as certain, and as unalterable*, as God himself. So that such as live without religion must die without hopes of mercy.

This should, one would think, awaken Christians into a better sense of their duty.

We are astonished to hear a profane man deny the truths of the Gospel; and yet it is in the end the same thing, whether a man denies them, or does not consider them, and live according to them. Both the one and the other must perish.

That we may avoid this sad choice, and not make void our Redeemer's merciful design *to save us*; may I, and every one who now hears me, seriously think of it, THAT NOW IS THE ONLY TIME IN WHICH WE ARE TO CHOOSE WHERE WE MUST BE FOR EVER; whether in a place of happiness or misery.

Let us endeavour to possess our hearts continually with the *belief, the certainty, the possibility*, (if it is not our own fault) of being saved,—of being saved and happy for ever.

For considering what God has done for us, in sending his Son into the world, it is plain, that he desires our salvation more than we ourselves do.

And let us not despair of succeeding. The Grace and Spirit of God will enable us to overcome all difficulties;—his grace may be had for asking;—the most unlearned, who is sensible of his own wants, can ask so as to be heard.

Let no Christian therefore say, as Christ's disciple once did, WHO CAN BE SAVED? Every *Christian, every sinner, every man*, to whom this word of salvation is preached, may be saved, if he will strive to work out his salvation with a concern answerable to what he is to gain or lose by it.

The misery of it is, Christians are apt to say, WHO CAN BE SAVED? And yet live as if it were the easiest thing in the world,—as if there were no manner of hazard,—as if every body would be saved of course. This shews the corruption of our nature with a witness; and this corrupt nature must be mended, as ever we hope to be saved.

Indeed, we are all *sinners*. But our greatest danger does not lie in *that*, because we have a certain remedy at hand; but our great danger lies, in our not sufficiently considering the danger of sin, and in our rejecting the only remedy;—in not considering, that this life is given, and continued to us, for no other end, but that we may every one of us work out our own salvation.

For this life is indeed *a state of trial*; and it concerns every one of us, as much

as



as his soul is worth, to take care how he spends this short life; forasmuch as God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, when every man will receive a sentence according to his works done in the body, that is, in this life. By which sentence, *they that have DONE GOOD*, who have been zealous of good works, *shall go into LIFE EVERLASTING*; and *they that have DONE EVIL*, and have not repented of the evil they have done, *shall go into EVERLASTING FIRE*.

Dreadful sentence indeed to all such as will not close with the salvation offered them by Jesus Christ; who will not *consider*, and *take pains*, and *do good now*, that they may *escape the bitter pains of eternal death*! But a comfortable sentence to such whose life is full of good works,—who try and judge themselves now,—and who endeavour to prevent the judgment of God by a sincere repentance.

And now, good Christians, what can I add more, than to exhort and to beseech you, that you take care, *that no seducing spirit beguile you of your reward*, by leading you into error. That no profane person, or instrument of *that seducing spirit*, of which there are but too many amongst us, do weaken your faith, or laugh you out of your hopes of heaven. That no loose and debauched persons, *who are slaves of that evil spirit*, do by their pestilent examples make you as wicked as themselves, and fit only for the society of devils when you die. And lastly, that your own corrupt hearts do not betray you into an indifference for your souls, and for the things that concern your eternal welfare.

And may the Blessed Jesus Christ, *who came into the world to save sinners*, may He enable all of us so to live, that, when we come to die, we may be numbered with his Saints in glory everlasting. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N XIX.

ALL PLEAS AND EXCUSES FOR LIVING IN IGNORANCE AND SIN MADE VOID BY GOD, IN MAKING HIS WILL AND PURPOSES KNOWN IN THE GOSPEL.

JOHN XV. 22.

*But now they have no cloak [or, excuse] for their sin.*

IT is most natural for people, *when they have done amiss*, to lay the blame any where but on themselves; and it is *as natural*, when they would follow their inclinations against their conscience, to hope, that God will accept of what excuse they can make.

Our first parents did so. The man blamed the woman;—the woman blamed the serpent;—when the fault was plainly in *themselves*: And accordingly they were *both* punished, notwithstanding their apology.

It was just so with the *people of the Jews*. They had impatiently expected the Messiah, whom God had promised by his Prophets from the beginning of the world. When the Messiah came, they utterly rejected him, though he had most *undeniable proofs* of his being *sent from God*; particularly his *doctrine*, which was most worthy of God, and his *miracles*, which were such as none other ever had done. To *these* Jesus Christ appeals, and declares, that after *this* “they had no *cloak for their sin*.” That such as *should reject him*, and the *gracious message* he brought

them from God, whatever they had to say for themselves, they would be punished as most *wicked opposers* of God’s good will towards them.

Now; as *inexcusable* as these people were in denying their Lord and Saviour, notwithstanding the *abundant proofs* of his authority, it will appear, that this is the very case of all such Christians *as profess to know God*, but *in works deny him*;—that men are as apt now, as ever they were, and with as little reason, to offer excuses for those sins which they commit against the Light of Nature and the Laws of God:—But that this *sentence* of Jesus Christ, “they have now no cloak for *their sin*,” is as righteous and true against us, if we obey not the Gospel, as ever it was against the Jews, who crucified the Son of God; and we shall as certainly be punished (whatever we can say for ourselves) as ever they were.

Now; that this may appear with all the plainness that a matter of this importance should do, and may more sensibly affect all our hearts, I shall *first* lay before you such ex-



*cuses* as men are apt to offer for their living in ignorance and sin: And then I shall endeavour to satisfy you, that God has most effectually made void all *pretences* and *pleas* whatever, by making his will and purposes known to us, after so gracious and convincing a manner. And then it will appear, whether we can have *any cloak for sin*,—any that can hide us from the wrath of God *revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*.

I. And first, I shall lay before you *such pleas and excuses as men usually offer for their living in ignorance and sin*.

It is certain, no man chooses to live in sin *on purpose to displease God*. It is as sure, that few people think they shall die in their sins unrepented of, and that they shall have *eternal torments for their portion*. But here is the case:—We are but too apt, through the corruption of nature, to be very fond of many things, which God (knowing they would hurt us) has forbidden us, upon pain of his everlasting displeasure. His everlasting displeasure we cannot think of without horror: neither can we, without some *trouble and pains*, deny ourselves, or do what God has commanded us.

We have therefore found out *some excuses*, which for the present serve to make our minds easy, though we live in a careless neglect of God's commands, and consequently of *our own salvation*.

For example:

*First*; There are people who think, that if they have not *faith*, it is for want of *sufficient evidence*; and that they are not bound to obey the Gospel, till they confess they have reason to do so.

*Secondly*; There are others who excuse themselves upon the account of *worldly business*, which takes up most of their thoughts and time.

*Thirdly*; And there are very many who doubt not but that their *want of capacity* to know their duty, will excuse their not doing it.

*Fourthly*; It is often said, that *temptations* are so many, and the *difficulties* of religion so great, that an allowance must be made, or few would be saved.

*Lastly*; If no other excuse will do, people are most apt to shelter themselves under the *mercy of God*, and hope (through his goodness) all will be well with them at last.

Now; it is most certain, that none of these (and these are the most common excuses) will save us from the wrath of God, *if we obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

I. And first, they that would make *the want of faith a cloak for their disobedience*, are either such as *pretend* they want *evidence* to convince them of the truth of the Gospel; or they are such as complain they want a degree of faith sufficient to incline their hearts to obedience.

The first are such as are by Jesus Christ himself condemned in this place. They *would not*, and they pretended they *could not*, believe "that he was sent from God;" they despised his *message*; they would not receive his *doctrine*; they gave no heed to his *miracles*; nor would they have patience, or be at the pains, to see whether this was *He whom the Prophets did say should come*. In short, they could not say what *would* convince them, if neither a *doctrine* worthy of God, nor *works* which none but God *could* do, were not sufficient. Jesus Christ therefore, without giving them *more proofs*, or the *sign* they demanded, positively pronounces their judgment in these words, "now they have *no cloak for their sin*."

And truly, it is to little purpose to argue with unbelievers of this sort, where the fault is not the want of evidence, but the want of an heart disposed to receive it. And, therefore, the Spirit of God is never solicitous to prove *such things* as all people *ought* to know, and *may* know, if it is not their own fault. Thus Moses begins the history of the creation: "In the beginning God *created the heavens and the earth*:" Supposing, most truly, that he who has his eyes open, and does not, *from the greatness and beauty of the creatures, acknowledge the Maker of them*, all the arguments in the world will not convince him. And the Apostle faith expressly, *all such are without excuse*!

Unbelievers, therefore, of this sort, we must leave (as our Saviour has done) to the judgment of God.

But then there are others, who hope they may with more reason plead their *want of faith*; that is, such a *lively faith* as may oblige them, in good earnest, to live as becometh the Gospel of Christ. Now; being told "that faith is the gift of God," they are apt to conclude, if they have it not, it is not their own fault; and *this* is their cloak, *this* their excuse. And indeed it will be a *good excuse*, provided a man can honestly say, that he hath seriously considered the danger of living in disobedience to God's commands;—that he hath heartily acknowledged, before God, his own inability to keep them without his grace;—that he has prayed for God's grace, and followed the motions of his Spirit, as far as he was able;—that he has *at least* done what was in his

<sup>1</sup> Rom. ix. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Eph. ii. 18.



own power, and kept out of the way of temptations;—that when he has done amiss, he has been sorry for it, begged God's pardon, and resolved not to do so again. If a man cannot say this with truth, it is plain he is not in earnest, and therefore want of grace will be no excuse before God, who knows that this is the least of his concern.

The Word of Truth saith, "Ask and ye shall have, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." We will do *none* of these, and yet we wonder that God does not give us a convincing witness of the truth in our hearts. In short, we faintly wish, that God would "touch our hearts," while we are *in good earnest* afraid lest he should do so, and force us to lead a new life.

While it is *thus* with us, it is no wonder that God does not more effectually *touch our hearts*. The wonder indeed is, that people should ever hope that this will excuse their disobedience.

After all, we are too apt to think this, and believe that we are in no danger, because we do not fear any; as if people could not harden their hearts, and be in danger, without perceiving it, when the whole Bible is a history of men ruining themselves, without fear or wit, even after they had sufficient warning of what would follow.

To give but one instance: The people of the Jews were forewarned by Christ, (whose miracles justified his authority) that their obstinacy and wickedness would, in a short time, bring such a destruction upon their temple and city, "that there should not be left one stone upon another." Now; were *they* any farther from this desolation, or did God excuse them, or defer his judgments, because they did not fear this, or because they would not believe Christ's words? The application is plain.

II. But if want of faith will not excuse our *disobedience*, we are apt to think that *worldly business will excuse us from making the care of our souls the great concern of our lives*.

Our blessed Lord saith the direct contrary. He saith, for instance, that a man makes a very ill bargain for himself, "who gains the whole world, and loseth his own soul." To this, people think it is enough to say, It is a burthen laid upon us,—*in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread*. We must live, and we must take care for those that come after us. As if the wise and good God had made the difficulties of this life *so great*, that men cannot take due care of their bodies and souls too.

After all, it is a *most plausible pretence*, and such as we are most apt to think a good one;

and therefore Jesus Christ has used a great many arguments to hinder us from making the cares of this life a cloak for not minding the next. "Consider the fowls of the air; consider the lillies of the field;" your heavenly Father feeds and clothes the one and the other. "Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow;" leave that to Heathens, who know not God; "but seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

These arguments are so plain, and so full to the purpose, that there are few Christians who do not believe it their duty to think of another world, and prepare for it.

But then we have another pretence for not doing it at present. When we have *provided for ourselves, for old age, and for our families*; then we shall, *by the grace of God*, in good earnest leave off all our evil ways, and become *new creatures*. But pray, what promise have we that God will *then give us his grace*? These are the words of the promise: "To day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." Will not our conversion *then* be too difficult a work? Shall not we be more likely to despair than undertake it? We know what the Scripture saith of such a change: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the Leopard his spots? then shall ye also, that are accustomed to do evil, learn to do well."

In one word; Industry in our several callings is a Christian duty; the care of our souls is a duty also, and much the more necessary. We may mind them both, if we please. And our fault is this: We are sent a while into this world to fit us for a better, and instead of doing so, we resolve to set up our rest here, and scarce think of the other.

III. And now we come to those who think that their *want of capacity to know their duty will excuse their not doing it*.

There is nothing more common than for people to cry,—What can be expected from the like of us?—We know no better:—"To whom much is given, from him much will be required."—But that is not our case; our talents are few, and our accounts are soon made up. And upon the strength of this way of arguing, many people make themselves tolerably easy.

Now; it is certainly true, the account we shall give will be according to the talents we have received. But then, as, when we compare ourselves with others, we are apt to *over-value* ourselves; so when we think of the account we must give, we are as apt to *under-value* what we have received.

Is it *knowledge* you want, and hope that *that will excuse you*? Why, let me tell you, that



that the learnedst man you know has just as much knowledge, and is just as much better for it, as he keeps more strictly the commandments of God; which you may do (if it is not your own fault) as well as the most learned. Hear what Christ saith to this purpose,—“Whosoever heareth my words, and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man.” *This is true wisdom*, all the rest is folly, let a man be never so knowing in his own or other people’s opinion.

But how shall we know what is expected from us? Why, just as you know any thing else, by *enquiry*, by *consideration*, and by taking the advice and direction of those whose business it is to inform you.

To be plain:—There is not one of those ignorant people who hope their want of knowledge will help to excuse them, but will give a very suitable answer when he is asked any thing about his worldly concerns. He knows, for instance, very well the difference betwixt an estate which he can leave to posterity, and one which is at the will of another. If such a man’s estate is in danger, you will soon see how sensible he is, and that he will lay all business aside to secure what he thinks *the main chance*. He will consider with himself, he will advise with others wiser than himself, he will ask to be informed, be *impatient* if he is put off, very thankful when he is told what he ought to do; he will do all this with seriousness, and a concern answerable to what lies at stake.

Tell one of these ignorant people of a good bargain, which is in his power to make for himself; you will soon see with what cheerfulness and good understanding he will go about it.

So for *cases of conscience*, such people very well know, when they are wronged, what justice they ought to expect. They can tell other people their duty plain enough; and is it not mere perverseness to pretend not to know their own?

But let people pretend what they please, every body knows what is meant by *adultery*, *drunkenness*, *perjury*, *lying*, *backbiting*, and such like. Now; we have a plain declaration of God’s will and purpose, concerning all such as commit any of these sins,\* “Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.”

Will people, after such a plain declaration as this, live in any of these sins, and hope that God expects no better of them? Verily even *they*, who think that God has given

them the poorest capacities, if one should tell them that it is their duty to live as they generally do, would soon see the wickedness of such a doctrine, and would profess that they know better things themselves.

After all, it is a question, whether the unlearned lie under greater difficulties than those that are more knowing. The favours of God to men are more equal than is usually thought of; and therefore, where he has given more flow capacities, he will (if they do not resist his will) give more grace. “I thank thee, O Father, (saith Jesus Christ) that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”

Accordingly, as too many can make a shift to go to hell with a great deal of knowledge; so we find many poor people, and of low capacities, as *conscientious* in their dealings, as *true lovers* of God, as *fearful* of offending him, as *thankful* for his favours, as *careful* of their ways,—as those that have a great deal more knowledge, and better opportunities of knowing their duty.

So that want of capacity (and in a Christian country) will never be accepted as an excuse for not keeping the commands of God; especially when it is considered, they who know least know enough to make them serious and careful of their ways; that they might know a great deal more than they commonly do; and that they seldom live up to that measure of knowledge which they have.

Such, therefore, as love darkness rather than light; such as may know their duty, and will not; and such as know their duty and yet neglect it, are (without more words) *inexcusable*.

IV. Another excuse is, that *the temptations we meet with are so many, and the difficulties so great, that an allowance must be made, or few can be saved*.

Well then—are they who make this excuse, resolved to take *the broad way*? You know, there are but *two*; the *narrow*, which leadeth unto life; and the *broad*, which leadeth to destruction: so saith our Saviour expressly, *Matth. vii. 13*; and tells us, moreover, that they are but few, in comparison, who take the narrow way, which leadeth unto life, because it is unpleasing to flesh and blood; while the other, because it is easy, is most chosen and thronged.

It is but too plain, that such as make this excuse are in that way which leadeth to destruction. The only question is, whether they are resolved to go on in it? Especially when they consider, that it certainly leadeth

\* 1 Cor. vi. 9.



to that place, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

Is it for nothing that God has made this known to us? Is it not that we may awake out of sleep? That we may see the danger we are in, and overcome all difficulties, for a few days, that we may escape being miserable for ever? And that we may be encouraged to do so, the Spirit of God has assured us, that our reward shall be great hereafter,—our comfort in the mean time such as cannot be expressed,—and that we shall have such assistance as shall enable us to overcome all difficulties. We have therefore but this choice, either to follow *our own inclinations* for a while, and be miserable for ever; or to obey the will of God, (though we meet with uneasiness) that we may obtain his favour, and be eternally happy. And it is mere folly to expect any other issue of our obedience or disobedience. For thus God has dealt with men since the world began: Such as obeyed him, with their whole hearts, found their advantage in it; and such as followed their own wicked imaginations were rejected of God, and delivered up to destruction.

Lastly; *When no other excuse will do, people are apt to shelter themselves under the mercy of God, and hope through his infinite goodness, all will be well with them at last, though they should not do their best to please him.*

It is most certain, that Mercy of God in Jesus Christ is the only hope of sinful men; but then, it is strange presumption to hope, that because God is good, I may therefore be bold to provoke him; especially, after God has expressly declared how far and to whom his mercy shall extend,—who may and who must not depend upon it. In particular, he has declared, that to the *impenitent and unbelievers* no mercy shall be shewn, whatever they may hope for. And that we may not mistake his meaning, he has plainly told us, *true penitents are such as bring forth fruits meet for repentance; and that true faith is such as purifieth the heart.*<sup>1</sup> So that if this word is the rule by which God will judge us, and by which we may judge whether we are out of danger or not, we see plainly, that the mercy of God will be of no advantage to us, while we knowingly transgress his laws.

Nay; that this may be *no cloak for our sin*, the Spirit of God has told us with what contempt God will treat those that, being often reprov'd, and called upon, do still harden their hearts till affliction comes upon them: "I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh."

And now you see, how much people may be mistaken;—how apt they are to deceive

themselves;—how rash, and how presumptuous, in concluding all may be well with them, without any warrant from God's word. And this should make us more cautious of trusting to a *false peace*, a *peace of mind* without reason and without promise.

What I mean is this:—Let us carefully examine ourselves, whether we do not depend upon some of these, or some such like pretences, for our future happiness? Always remembering, *that without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* That the duties of Christianity are *indispensable*. That God did never excuse any one of his servants, from the beginning of the world to this day, from observing them faithfully. *That no man can serve two masters*; so that it is in vain to call myself a *servant of God*, when I do not the things which he has commanded.

Let us consider farther, that if we meet with temptations, it was designed *we should do so*, that we might thereby be obliged to depend more entirely upon God. That if we are sometimes at a loss, it is *so ordered*, that we may look up to God for light and salvation. That *if we love darkness rather than light*, it is no wonder if we miss our way, and are bewildered. That if we want hearts to set about the work of our salvation in good earnest, it is because we know, in our consciences, that we never sincerely prayed to God to give us grace to do so. That if we are careless because the rest of the world are so, and hope to come off as well as others, it is because we do not consider, that it will be no comfort to be damned for company, no more than it would be pleasure to be poor, or sick, or tormented here, for company.

Let us consider a little farther:—That want of time can be *no excuse* in a Christian country, where one day in seven is set apart for *this business* and none else. That want of capacity cannot be pretended, when we understand things much more difficult to be known. That to put off the concern of our souls to the last, is plainly to value them less than any thing else. That to think ourselves safe, because we do not fear any danger, is to be ignorant of a great truth, which is—that people may be given over to a *reprobate mind*, that is, a mind void of judgment. Lastly; that such pretences as these will rather increase our guilt, than serve to obtain our pardon, when we appear before God. And the conclusion will be, that he who seeks out excuses for not living as becomes the Gospel of Christ, is only contriving how to shut himself out of heaven.

In one word; a man that is heartily concerned for his salvation will ask himself this one short question, *Why do I hope to be saved?* He that dares not do this, may depend upon it



he is not in the way of salvation. And he that is once fully persuaded, that without a *sincere repentance*, a *lively faith*, and an *unfeigned charity*, he cannot be saved, will never think of making excuses to free himself from these duties, and the fruit of them—*holiness of life*. For a man to be at ease upon any other account, or to hope that any thing in the world will atone for want of true piety, is to hope without *reason* and without *scripture*.

This is what was necessary to be said, to keep us from *false hopes*, and an unsafe peace of conscience; which that it may do, I commend it and you to the good blessing of God. And I beseech you, my beloved, remember this *one thing*, *that all is vanity*, besides taking care of your souls.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, &c.

## S E R M O N XX.

### CORRUPTION OF HUMAN NATURE, AND THE NECESSITY OF A REDEEMER.

LUKE v. 5. *We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.*

AND so we shall ever do, without thy grace and help, O Jesus. Enable me, therefore, I beseech Thee, to speak to the hearts and to the capacities of those that hear me. Let me learn, and be able, from the sense of my own corruption and frailties, to pity such as are ignorant of the danger they are in; to warn such as are careless; and to comfort and direct such as are weary with the burthen of their sins, and lead them to Thee, their Redeemer; for thy merit's sake, O Blessed Saviour. Amen.

ROMANS vii. 24, 25.

*O wretched Man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? Why; the grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.\**

THE meaning of these words will be fully understood, if we look back to some verses going before; particularly to verse 18: "I know," (that is, I feel by sad experience) "that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will" that which is good "is present with me;" that is, I easily perceive it; "but how to perform that which is good I find not;" that is, of myself I am not able to do it.

Now, it being thus with me, *the good that I would*, (that is, that which my reason approves) *this I do not*; but *the evil which I would not*, (which my conscience tells me I ought not to do) *this I do*. This troubles me, grieves me, and makes me afraid for myself, and even forces me to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (who shall free me from these bodily appetites, which enslave me, and expose me to ruin?) *who shall deliver me? why; THE GRACE OF GOD*, (vouchsafed unto mankind) *THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD*; this will deliver every man, who sincerely lays hold of it, from the slavery of those sins which do so easily beset us.

Now; I shall take occasion, from these words, to lay before you—*First*; The great

corruption of human nature. *Secondly*; The great danger we are in on that account. *Thirdly*; This will shew the necessity and blessing of a Redeemer. *Fourthly*; We shall then see plainly, the great love of God in sending his Son to redeem us. *Fifthly*; We shall consider, the great obligation this love of God lays upon Christians. And *lastly*; The dreadful condition of all such as neglect or despise this great mercy of God vouchsafed unto men.

Believe it, Christians, that what I am going to say to you upon these heads will be worthy of your most serious attention. They are truths on which our salvation depends, and therefore I would press them upon your hearts with all imaginable plainness, as well as earnestness.

I. Let us first consider *the great corruption of our nature*; the knowledge of this being the foundation of all true religion. "They that be whole, (saith our Redeemer) need not a physician, but they that are sick;" *these*, and *these only*, will desire and value the help that is offered them. Jesus Christ, (saith the Prophet Isaiah, lxi. 1.) when he cometh, *will preach glad tidings*—but to whom? why, *to the meek*; for such only would be disposed to receive his message:

\* See John xv. 4. Acts iv. 12. xiii. 26. Rom. iii. 23. v. 8. Eph. ii. 4. Gal. iii. 13. 1 Tim. i. 15. 1 John iii. 1. iv. 19. Psalm lxxxv. 9. Baruch iv. 4.



*He would bind up the broken-hearted, for such only would be glad of help: He would proclaim liberty to the captives, for such only as are sensible of the bondage of sin will be glad to be set at liberty.*

It was such as these that our Lord invited, when he said, "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden," with the burden of your sins, "and I will give you rest."

In short; wherever the Gospel was preached, all such as feared God, and were in fear for themselves, when they were told of a judgment to come; these received the Gospel with a glad heart, as shewing them the way to obtain pardon and happiness. Whilst *all the proud*, as the same Prophet speaks, *and such as do wickedly, fearing no evil*, to such the Gospel will be preached without effect.

Now; my design, in the first place, is, to raise in your hearts *the same concern and fear* which the Apostle supposeth every man will have, who sets himself seriously to consider his condition by nature, and without a Redeemer.

Our first parents were *most certainly* created innocent and upright, able and disposed to obey any commands that God should think good to give them.

We are very sure it is not so with us *now*. Every one for himself knows, that matters are wretchedly amiss with us, until by the grace of God our nature is changed for the better. Whoever will be at the pains to look into his own heart, will find this corruption of nature discovering itself upon all occasions. For instance: We readily acknowledge the justice of the laws of God, and yet we find an unwillingness in ourselves to obey them. We know that we want both knowledge, and grace, and help, from God; and yet we ask them but seldom, and with indifference. We cannot but own, that we live upon God's bounty and blessing, and yet we can hardly find in our hearts to be thankful. We profess to believe, that God sees all our actions, and yet we are too apt to sin as presumptuously as if he were an idol, who could neither reward nor punish us. In one word; we hear what he has threatened without fear, and see his judgments upon others, without so much as thinking how soon it may be our own case.

These are desperate disorders, whatever people think of them. But these are not all the proofs of a corrupt nature. We are forced to struggle hard with ourselves to do what we know to be not only our *duty*, but our *interest*, to do. The Lord our Maker, we confess, has a right to be *loved*; to be *feared*, to be *depended upon*. Can we say with any truth, that we are naturally dis-

posed to *love*, to *fear*, and to put our whole *trust* in him? Do not we find in ourselves too great an indifference for the glorious promises God has made us; and do not we discover a very little fear for his terrible threatenings?

Our own experience may convince us, that we are apt to have a much greater concern for our *bodies* than for our souls; for this life, than for that which is to come; for *Earth*, than for *Heaven*.

If our reason does sometimes get the better of our corrupt affections, and we resolve to do what we believe will please God, yet how soon do we forget our good resolutions? One day condemning ourselves for having done amiss; and the next day running into the same miscarriages, and falling into the sins we so lately repented of.

If we look into the world, we see nothing, in a manner, but sin and disorder. We see too many who live without God in the world, committing all iniquity with greediness; upon whom no reason, no arguments, will prevail, to hinder them from ruining themselves to all eternity.

Even amongst those who pretend to live in the fear of God, how many do we see, upon whom his laws have little or no influence? Do not we see, for example, that many—too many—must be forced by human laws, and the punishments that attend them, to do what they know in their consciences they ought to do; to do justice to their neighbour; to make satisfaction to those that they have wronged.

How many are there, who make a *mock* of sin, though they know that it must be most displeasing to God; and make a jest of damnation, which ought to make the stoutest heart to tremble;—who are not content to be wicked themselves, but take pains to corrupt others? And (without giving any more proofs of the corruption of nature) do not too, too many live, as if they did not believe there is a God, either to reward or punish them?

All these pretend to reason; and indeed God has given all men reason. But lusts and passions will corrupt and blind our reason; what then would become of the wisest of men, if God did not help us by his Spirit and by his grace?

You see, Christians, what we are by nature, what men are capable of, what they *would be*, when God leaves them to themselves and to their own natural corruption. You shall now see,

II. *The very great danger we are in on that account, if God should leave us to ourselves, and to our own natural powers.*

When



When one looks into the world, and sees the generality of people without any concern and fear for themselves, and for what may come hereafter, one cannot but conclude, *surely, they do not know the danger they are in.*

This is indeed the root of all our misery. We are in the way of ruin, and do not mind it. We are afraid of laying things to heart, lest they should make us uneasy; and our misfortune is, that we are not (the generality of Christians) so uneasy as we should be.

For who *can*, who *ought*, to be easy, that knows, that *considers*, the danger to which his corrupt nature exposes him? For as such, in the first place, he is under the displeasure of God, and, without God's help and grace, he *must* continue so unto his life's end; forasmuch as no man *can* change, *can* mend a corrupt nature, by a *reason* and *will* that are both corrupt.

Now; God can take no pleasure in any man, until his nature be mended; till then he is an enemy to God, and under the government of Satan. This we learn from the commission which the Apostles had from Christ himself,\* which was, "To preach the Gospel to the heathens, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

What the power of Satan is, we learn from many instances of Scripture; and we see with our own eyes the sad effects of his power upon those who are under his government, and who are led captive by him at his will.

In short; these are the evils which, as fallen creatures, we are, every soul of us, subject to:—A corrupt heart;—the malice and power of wicked spirits;—a proneness to evil continually;—the temptations of an evil world;—a weakness of nature which cannot withstand them;—a certain prospect of death;—the fears of a judgment to come;—the continual dread of the sentence then to be passed upon sinners;—and, lastly, the assurance that we cannot possibly deliver ourselves out of this sad condition.

The thoughts of these things are enough to make the stoutest heart to tremble, and to distract the wisest man living, if the God of mercy had not proposed a way to deliver us out of the dangers that threaten us.

These dangers I have set before you,—not to drive you to despair—but to awaken us all into a just sense of the unhappy state we are in without the blessing of a Redeemer.

III. *The necessity and blessing of a Redeemer*, we now come to consider.

Now; every thoughtful person may be convinced, that *as fallen creatures we must*

\* Acts xvi. 18.

have forfeited all the favours which God designed us at our creation. That we lost that Holy Spirit by which our souls were united to God, and by which we had power to know, and to do, whatever God should require of us. That by the loss of that Holy Spirit, our reason became insufficient to guide us; our will and our affections became ungovernable, so that of course we became subject to all manner of wickedness. That, while this was our condition, God could take no pleasure in us, and we had nothing to expect but the punishment due to our offences. And, lastly, that we could not, by any thing we could do, help ourselves out of this sad condition.

Now, does not all this shew us the absolute necessity of a Redeemer;—of one, who could undertake to make satisfaction for our offences to the Divine Justice;—of one, who could plead with God for his lost creatures, who could prevail with him to forgive us, and to receive us again into his favour?

Who does not see the necessity of some one, who could let us know upon what terms God would forgive us;—who could shew us the way and means of salvation;—who could give us that Holy Spirit which we had lost, to help us to regain our former happy state;—of one, who could help us to subdue all our enemies spiritual and temporal; who could set us an example how we ought to live so as to please God;—and lastly, one who should be able to deliver us from the wrath to come?

Now, all this our Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ, has done for us. He has given us the greatest assurance, that for his sake God will be reconciled to us;—that he will accept of our repentance when we have done amiss;—that he will treat us, as he would have done our first parents, had they not so grievously offended him, if we will but be governed by him;—that he will give us his Holy Spirit, to sanctify and mend our corrupt nature;—and, what is the most astonishing mercy, he has prevailed with God, to make us everlastingly happy, if, during this short life of trial, we will but do our best to fit ourselves for that happy state.

And lastly, to magnify this blessing, every one, from the first man to the last that shall be born, may have an interest in this blessing, if he loseth it not by his own fault.

IV. Now let us consider *the great love of God, in sending his own Son to be our Redeemer.* "God (saith our Redeemer) so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 16.



That our hearts may be touched with a sense of this mighty blessing, let us consider ourselves as poor, wretched, sinful creatures, in the certain way to ruin, utterly unable to help ourselves. Then let us look unto God, who has millions and millions of creatures better than the best of us, who never offended him, always ready to serve and glorify him. What can we think could move this great God not to overlook this vile part of his creation, but to give his own Son for their redemption? Why, verily, this love of God passeth our comprehension; nor could we have believed it, had not this his Son laid down his life to assure us of his Father's love for his poor creatures.

This Love of God, this tender concern for lost mankind, will appear still more surprising, when we consider, that he made this his only Son to become subject to the law made for sinners, and to all the miseries and afflictions which sinners deserve and are subject to; to poverty, to contempt, to sorrow, to pain, and to death after all, in order to deliver us from eternal death.

I know there can be no case on earth to be compared to this Love of God, in order to raise our value for so great a blessing.

However, let us imagine, how we should value one who had delivered us out of a cursed slavery, and paid our ransom; or one who had hazarded his own life to save any one of us from certain death? And has not our gracious God done this, and much more than this, for us? But how few are affected, as they ought to be, with this amazing instance of love, mercy, and goodness!

I will but just hint to you some instances of his mercy in this dispensation, in which he has had a merciful regard to all our disorders.

God knew that our reason, corrupted by our passions, was not able to lead us in the way we should go; for as the Spirit of God<sup>a</sup> assures us, and we find it by sad experience, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." God has therefore given us safe and infallible rules to walk by, to lead us to heaven and happiness. He knew how apt we are to go astray; he has therefore promised, for our Redeemer's sake, to accept of our repentance. He knew the weakness of our nature, and the difficulties, and enemies, we had to struggle with; he therefore offers us the assistance of his Almighty Spirit.

In short; The greatest sinner may be sure of pardon, if it is not purely his own fault; —the weakest Christian may depend upon all the assistance that he can possibly want; —the meanest servant of Christ may be assured

that he will not be overlooked; —and every Christian has a sure promise that his labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. This will lead us to another particular:

V. To consider *what obligations this great Love of God lays upon Christians.*

Do not imagine, Christians, that God intended that all this love should be lost upon us, or that he expects no other fruits of his Son's labours and sufferings, besides a bare profession of gratitude. *Woe be to that man who acts as if he thinks so!*

We do indeed, in our daily devotions, give God thanks in a very particular manner for his inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, —a love which passeth all possible expressions and acknowledgement on our part. But what will this signify, if in our works we deny him; if in our lives we are like heathens, not knowing or not valuing the blessing of a Redeemer?

What then does God expect from us, on account of this mighty love? Why; that we should act like reasonable creatures, like people who know they are upon their trial, and that this is for eternity; who may be happy if it is not their own fault, and who will be miserable beyond redemption, if they close not with this offer of mercy.

God expects, therefore, that we should glorify him in our lives for this his great goodness; that we should convince the world that we do really believe the things we profess to believe, by working out our salvation with fear, with a concern answerable to what we hope for, or what we fear. He expects that we should remember what manner of love he had for us, that we should be called the Sons of God. That we should resolve with those mentioned in the book of Wisdom, [xv. 2.] "We will not sin, knowing that we are accounted thine." That we should not debase ourselves, by becoming the servants of Satan, from whose dominion we have been redeemed by the precious blood of his dear Son; but should let the love of God constrain us to shew our gratitude, by fruits worthy of so great a mercy; especially in these dangerous days, wherein the name of Christ is blasphemed, and his sufferings not valued by unbelievers, occasioned chiefly by the bad lives of Christians; —but then they are such Christians as are certain to be shut out of heaven, for being as bad as infidels.

There is one other obligation which the Spirit of God<sup>b</sup> has laid upon all such as value the blessing of a Redeemer: "If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." This is to be the motive and

<sup>a</sup> Rom. xiv. 12.

<sup>b</sup> 1 John iv. 11.



the pattern of our love for our neighbour.—  
 “This command we have from God, that  
 “he who loveth God do love his neighbour  
 “also.”<sup>m</sup>—This leads us to consider, in  
 the last place,

VI. *The sad condition of those who neglect,  
 or despise, this mercy of God.*

It is the Spirit of God who hath declared,  
 “That there is none other name under  
 “heaven, given among men, whereby we  
 “must be saved, but only the name of our  
 “Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>n</sup> So that whoever does  
 not lay hold of this means of salvation must  
 undoubtedly perish to all eternity.

If you wonder how it is possible for any  
 man who knows this to hazard his soul to all  
 eternity, the Apostle will give you the true  
 reason: “The God of this world hath  
 blinded the minds of them that believe not.”

Little do wicked men and unbelievers  
 think, that *Satan, the God of this world*, is he  
 who is perpetually suggesting to them such  
 things as weaken and destroy their faith, such  
 pleasures as blind their understandings, such  
 ways of living, as lead them directly to hell.  
 And yet it is certainly so; he hath blinded  
 their eyes, so that they cannot see the con-  
 sequence of *abused* mercy, nor the sad con-  
 dition of *being given over to a reprobate mind*;  
 though there be no condition more dreadful,  
 than for a man to be subject to the justice of  
 God, without any interest in his mercy.—  
 This made David, (though in the main a  
 good man) this made him mourn so bitterly,  
 when, through the corruption of his nature,  
 he had grievously offended God: “I am sore  
 “troubled; mine iniquities are an heavy  
 “burthen; I go mourning all the day long.”  
 What a dreadful condition had he been in,  
 even to eternity, had there been no sacrifice  
 for sin? And, indeed, there was none under  
 the Law for such sins as his was, as he him-  
 self acknowledges; nor would his troubled  
 spirit, his broken and contrite heart, have  
 been accepted for his pardon, but only for  
 the sake of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of  
 all from the foundation of the world.

In one word: We may, if we will but  
 consider, we *may* judge how sad our condi-  
 tion and danger is, without a Redeemer, by  
 the way which God has made use of to save  
 us from ruin. Nothing, in the decrees of  
 God, nothing could save us, but the sending  
 of his own Son to lay down his life for us.

I have set before you, Christians, the great  
 disorders we are by nature subject to;—the  
 great hazard we are in on that account;—  
 the only sure remedy we have to trust to;—  
 the great goodness of God in pitying our sad  
 condition;—what he requires in return for

this mercy;—and the sad consequence of not  
 closing with his gracious designs for our  
 good.

Great kindnesses, or great judgments, are  
 the usual methods by which God reduces his  
 poor wandering creatures. Which of these  
 methods will you wish to be dealt with?  
 I have set before you the greatest instance  
 of love, goodness, mercy, and kindness, that  
 was ever shewed to men or angels. If this  
 does not work upon you, and if ever you  
 hope to be saved, you have nothing to look  
 for, but to be reclaimed from the ways  
 of sin by severe judgments. But this is  
 not what God delights in; he would have  
*his goodness*, and *that only*, to lead men to  
 repentance.

Few people can be easy without some-  
 thing which they call religion. For God’s  
 sake remember this truth: That no religion  
 will be of use to us, which does not mend  
 our corrupt nature, and by doing so restore  
 us to the favour of God; which does not  
 bring us to love him for his goodness to us,  
 and to strive to glorify him by leading a  
 Christian life; by an humble dependence on  
 his providence, and submission to his will;  
 and by doing good in our generation. With-  
 out this, all our religion is vain, and we shall  
 still be in the way of perdition.

Have a care, Christians, of a delusion  
 which too many are in danger of being  
 ruined by, by fancying that the corruption  
 of their nature will be some excuse for their  
 unchristian lives. God commands us cer-  
 tain duties; he offers us all necessary assist-  
 ance; he proposes to reward us according to  
 our sincere endeavours to obey him. To  
 say after this, *we are all sinners, and who can  
 help it?* without resolving that moment to  
 repent and amend, is an affront to our dear  
 Redeemer, and a doing despite to the Spirit  
 of Grace.

We are ready enough to own the blessing  
 of a Redeemer, when we only consider Jesus  
 Christ as coming into the world to save sin-  
 ners; as being our *Advocate with God* to ac-  
 cept of our repentance. But we should al-  
 ways remember, that He is also our *Law-  
 giver*, and that we must obey his laws, or he  
 will be no blessing to us. You see therefore,  
 Christians, to whom our Redeemer will be  
 a blessing; even to such as by a saving faith,  
 and a sincere obedience, do suffer themselves  
 to be made partakers of a divine nature.

And now, before I conclude, I must advise  
 you of two ways by which Satan will at-  
 tempt to divert you from making a profitable  
 use of such doctrines as these; either he  
 tempts Christians to despair, and out of a  
 deep sense of their corruption to cry out, *O  
 wretched creature that I am, who shall deliver  
 me from the sin that does beset me?* Or he  
 tempts

<sup>m</sup> 1 John iv. 21.    <sup>n</sup> Acts iv. 12.    <sup>o</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 4.



tempts them to believe, that since Christ came into the world to save sinners, it is a very easy thing to be saved. These are both of them very dangerous delusions.

Jesus Christ did indeed come into the world to save sinners; but what sort of sinners? Why, such as do forsake their sins, and fully purpose to lead holy lives for the time to come. But as for such as depend upon a bare outward performance of the duties of Christianity; who comfort themselves with being able to say, *We have ate and drank at thy table, and we are called by thy name*; our Lord himself has declared,<sup>p</sup> what judgment he will pass upon such Christians: "Depart from me; I know you not." A sentence (believe it, Christians!) that should make the very best of us examine, whether our lives and our works do answer our outward profession.

As for such sinners as are truly afraid for themselves;—who sincerely lament the corruption of their nature, and out of an earnest desire to please God cry out, *who shall deliver me from this body of death?* let such always remember what follows, *I thank God through Jesus Christ*; that is, for his sake, God will deliver me from the evil effects of the corruption of my nature, from the power of the devil, and from eternal death.

If it be so, you will be apt to ask, Why then are there few that be saved? The case is sad, but plain; people will not fear for themselves; they will not part with their sins, nor lay hold of the mercy offered them.

<sup>p</sup> Luke xiii. 27.

But may every sinner (says the desponding Christian) be confident, that God will pardon those who have so many ways offended him? Take an answer—not from me, but—from the Son of God himself, who has declared even with an oath,<sup>q</sup> "Verily, all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men."

Why should any, the most fearful Christian, imagine, that that Divine Shepherd, who with so much love and pains came to seek his lost sheep, that *he* will turn his back upon one that cries after him for help;—that he would lay down his life for his sheep, and after that reject them. Let not the most disconsolate Christian entertain such unkind thoughts of God, and of our good Redeemer. Rather let us comfort ourselves, under the most desponding thoughts, with the argument of the Apostle:<sup>r</sup> "If when we were sinners and enemies to God, we were reconciled to him by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled we shall be saved by him; for he ever liveth to make intercession for us."

And now, let me leave this one truth upon your minds; it is a truth as certain as this [the Bible] is the Word of God—That unless our corrupt nature be mended before we die, we shall never go to heaven, never be happy.

May the good Spirit of God fix these truths in all our hearts, for Jesus Christ's sake. To whom, with the Father and that Holy Spirit, be ascribed all honour and glory now and for ever. *Amen.*

<sup>q</sup> Mark iii. 28.

<sup>r</sup> Rom. v. 10.

## S E R M O N XXI.

St. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS.

THE NATURE, THE POWER, AND THE MALICE, OF EVIL SPIRITS; AND THE NECESSITY OF A STEDFAST FAITH IN THE PROTECTION OF GOD.

M A R K V. 13.

*And forthwith Jesus gave them leave. And the unclean spirits went out, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the sea, (they were about two thousand) and were choaked in the sea.*

**T**HE church has appointed *this festival*, that we may not forget that there are other beings, besides those we every day see and converse with, with which we are greatly concerned; the Word of God assuring us, that both *good and bad Angels* are appointed or permitted by God, the one to succour and defend us, the other to hurt and ruin us, whenever we take ourselves from under his protection.

Sometimes we are apt to ascribe too much power to evil spirits, and to be too much afraid of those whom we suspect to have dealings with them. And sometimes we despise them and their power, as if we had nothing to fear from them. We are in the wrong in both these extremes.

The history, which I am going to explain to you will give us a better account of these

<sup>p</sup> See Luke x. 17. John xiii. 27. 2 Cor. ii. 19. Eph. ii. 2. James iv. 7. Rev. xii. 12. Eccles. xxxix. 28.



matters. It is mentioned by three of the Evangelists, as a subject which the Christian world ought to be well acquainted with; so that you may be sure it is your duty to know and understand what God has revealed to us concerning the *nature*, the *power*, the *number*, and the *malice*, of those evil spirits that are about us, and how we may be secure from any evil they can do to us.

The history is this:

There met Jesus a man possessed with a legion of devils: His condition was very miserable; he was night and day in the mountains, and in the tombs, crying and cutting himself with stones; he had been often bound with fetters and chains, but to no purpose, he plucked them asunder, neither could any man tame him. Jesus, seeing him in this condition, had compassion on him, and commanded the evil spirits to leave him. They knew they must obey, but they besought him that they might go into an herd of swine, that were feeding hard by; the very nature of them being to do mischief whenever they are permitted.—Jesus, that he might convince the world how dreadful their malice is, and how great their power, when left to themselves, and not restrained by God, therefore gave them leave. And behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And that very legion of evil spirits, which just before could not destroy one poor man, (their power being limited by God) can now destroy with ease two thousand other creatures, having obtained leave so to do.

When Jesus was about to leave this place, he that had been possessed with the devils besought him that he might be with him; fearing, very probably, that the devils and his disorders might return, when once his deliverer should be gone and at a distance from him; but Jesus suffered him not to go with him, but bade him go home to his friends, and tell them how great things the Lord had done for him. From which he would have us to learn, that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, and that his providence is sufficient security against all attempts of the devil, provided we are but in the way of our duty.

Now; from this history we learn three truths of great importance. *First*; That the Devil is a spirit of great malice, and great power. *Secondly*; That both his malice and power are altogether under the government of God. And *Thirdly*, that God often permits him to do great mischief for the punishment of wicked men, and for the trial of the faith of good men.

I. And first; that the Devil is a spirit of great power and malice, is made known to us

as often almost as he is spoken of in the Holy Scriptures. St. Paul expresses his power after this manner: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood," that is, against men like ourselves, "but against the rulers of the darkness of this world," against wicked spirits, who endeavour all that is possible to make men as wicked as themselves. And St. Peter [v. 8.] likens him to "a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour," that is, whom he may be permitted to destroy." "He was a murderer from the beginning" saith our Lord, John viii. 44. And, Rev. xii. 9, he is said to deceive the whole world.

And, because we are more affected with what we see or hear to be done by him, this history is recorded, that we may not want sufficient evidence of what he can do.

Having got possession of the poor man, he had no longer rest. Being forced by the command of Christ to leave this habitation, his malice went as far as he knew it would be suffered to go; for getting possession of the swine, they were immediately every one destroyed.

Now; this miracle being the only one of all that Jesus wrought, which brought any thing that looked like an injury to any man, we may be sure it was permitted, in order to fix a lasting impression and remembrance upon all that should hear of it, what great power the Devil has when he is let loose to do what he pleases. And it was well even for these very people who lost their goods, that they knew the power of evil spirits by such a judgment as this. For the Devil could as easily have destroyed two thousand of them, as two thousand of their swine, had God permitted him to have used his power.

II. For being entirely under the government of God, he can do nothing without God's permission.

The text saith, "Jesus gave them leave," to assure us, that without his leave they had no power. And in the book and history of Job it is revealed to us, that the evil spirit has no power to exercise his malice, but when he has express leave from God: "Hast thou made a fence about him, and about all that he hath?" This that the Devil complained of was Job's security; but when God gave the word, "Behold, all that he has is in thy power;" we see what short work the Devil made of all that the world calls happiness. He left him neither estate, nor child, nor health, nor friend, except God only; in whose providence, notwithstanding his severe afflictions, he continued to put his trust, and in the end it turned to account, and for his good.

And our Lord told St. Peter, "Behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may

<sup>1</sup> Eph. vi. 12. <sup>2</sup> Job i. 10. <sup>3</sup> Ibid. ver. 12.

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“sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not;”—that God would deliver thee from that great trial and temptation;—and accordingly he was delivered by the grace of God; though God suffered Satan to proceed so far as to make St. Peter to deny his Lord against his most solemn promises and resolutions. But then this was to shew us two things; *first*, what poor weak creatures we are when left to ourselves, and to Satan to govern us; and *secondly*, that the Devil’s malice is restrained by God, who permits him to make use of just so much malice as will answer God’s ends, and serve his glory.

III. *That God permits the Devil to make use of his malice and power, for the trial of good men, and for the punishment of the wicked, is what we now come to consider, and to prove by the word of God.*

And in the first place, this is what the Spirit of God foretold the church of Smyrna: “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer. Behold, the Devil will cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried. Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”

This was the case of Job, and this was the great mistake of his friends, who thought that punishment was *always* for the faults of him that suffered. And yet our Blessed Saviour, by the decree of God, was to be the most afflicted, while he was the most innocent, of men. And his Apostle St. Paul had a messenger of Satan, that is, a disease, by God’s permission, inflicted on him by Satan, to prevent that pride which would otherwise have ruined him.<sup>2</sup>

In all these cases, good men have a sure promise to support their spirits: “God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above what you are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.”<sup>3</sup>

But then this is not always the design of God’s permitting the Devil to have his liberty; it is very often to punish the wicked that he takes off his restraining power. “He cast upon sinners (saith the Psalmist, lxxviii. 49.) “the fierceness of his anger, “by sending evil angels amongst them.” And God had no sooner decreed to destroy Ahab for his wickedness, but an evil spirit forthwith undertakes to bring him to destruction,<sup>4</sup> by becoming a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets, whose advice he followed to his ruin.

By this time you will perceive, good Christians, that God has mercifully provided

for our instruction, in preserving this history in all its particulars for the use of his church. Here is the great power and malice of the Devil: Here is the providence of God restraining and limiting him, how far he shall go, and no farther: Here is God’s sovereignty over all creatures, let who will be the owners of them: Lastly, here is the miserable estate of those that are under the power of the Devil, and are led captive by him at his will. All these things are set forth in this history, so as to affect our minds after the most sensible manner.

You cannot think that this history was recorded by *three* Evangelists, only to entertain our curiosity, only to be read and forgot, and the thoughts of it laid aside. Pray then, let us consider the use we ought to make of what at present you have heard.

And first, the power of Evil Spirits is made known to us, in order to make us more careful of our ways, lest they get an advantage over us. “Be sober, be vigilant, “(saith the Apostle) because your adversary the Devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.” If people will live as if they had no enemies, notwithstanding the warning God has given them, their ruin is plainly of themselves.

We have need, you see, to mind the Apostle’s directions, “To put on the whole armour of God, that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil.”<sup>5</sup> Particularly, a *stedfast faith in the power of God*, which will oblige us to depend upon him as a child upon his father, and not suffer us to doubt either his *good will*, or his readiness to succour us.

The text saith, “Jesus gave them leave.” You see then, that without God’s leave they cannot hurt the meanest of his creatures. How careful then should we be to put ourselves, and all that belongs to us, under God’s protection every day of our lives; how easy and secure when we have done so! Being well assured, that it is not in the power of the Devil, or his agents, to go any farther than God permits them.

You see, thirdly, how careful we should be, *not to grieve the Holy Spirit by which we are sealed unto the day of redemption*. For when the Spirit of God forsakes us, there are other spirits very ready to take the government of us. It is said of Saul, that when “the Spirit of the Lord departed from him, “an evil spirit from the Lord troubled “him;”<sup>6</sup> and it may be as truly said of all wicked men, that when they forsake God, God will forsake them, and then they are under the power of the Devil.

<sup>2</sup> Luke xxii. 31. <sup>3</sup> Rev. ii. 10. <sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Cor. x. 13.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Kings xxii. 21.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Pet. v. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. vi. 12.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Sam. xvi. 14.



And indeed all the world are under the government of God and his good Angels, or under the direction of Satan and his evil spirits; and therefore, before we are received into the church of Christ, we do solemnly renounce the Devil at our baptism; by which Sacrament we are put under the immediate government of God and his good Angels, who are by God appointed to minister unto them that are heirs of salvation.<sup>1</sup> Now, if we force these good Angels to forsake their charge, there are others always ready to take us again into their power.

And here I shall take occasion to explain the meaning of two passages in the New Testament, and of speaking upon a subject which is not so well understood by Christians as it ought to be. The passages I mean are, 1 Tim. i. 20. and 1 Cor. v. 5. in both which places we have mention made of *delivering wicked men to Satan*.

Now; because this is laughed at by profane people, who do not know the Scriptures, I will shew you what this means.

The Spirit of God then tells us, that the Devil hath a kingdom and subjects, over which he reigns; that is, over the children of disobedience: And that Jesus Christ has also his kingdom and subjects, even all that obey his laws. And therefore, when the Apostles and Ministers of Christ gained any of the subjects of Satan unto Christ, they are said in Scripture, "to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

Now; when any of Christ's subjects shall become rebellious, and refuse to obey his laws, his Ministers are directed to admonish them of their sin, and of the dishonour they do their Prince and Saviour; and if they shall refuse their godly admonitions, then they are to turn them out of the church, that is, that society which Christ governs by his laws, protects by his power here, and intends to bless with eternal happiness hereafter.

Being thus turned out of Christ's church, (that is, excommunicated) they are said *to be delivered to Satan*, not to be damned, as blasphemous people love to charge the Ministers of Jesus Christ; but, as the Apostle saith, "That his Spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus;" that is, That sinners, if they are not utterly lost, may, with the prodigal when he was forced to herd with swine, see the happy state they are fallen from, and repent, and desire to get out of the snare and from under the dominion of the Devil, and be restored to the favour of God. So that excommunication is made use of, not as a *punishment* only, but as a *remedy*; that sinners being awakened and startled at the evil state they are in, being deprived of all hopes of

salvation while they are out of the church, they may more earnestly desire to be restored to God's grace and kingdom, that they may work out their salvation with more fear and caution for the time to come.

Were these things well considered, Christians would not look upon excommunication as a light matter, but would dread it, (when inflicted according to the will of Christ for crimes against God) they would fear that sentence as they would hell fire. They would be afraid of church censures, and of despising or weakening that discipline which Jesus Christ has appointed to guard his laws from contempt, and to preserve his subjects from destruction.

*To be delivered to Satan!* What a dreadful thought must that be to any one who does but read this history which we are now upon! And though every subject of Satan is not in the condition of this poor creature, without rest night and day, cutting himself with stones, and wandering in the mountains and amongst the tombs, yet it is misery enough to be under the government of Satan, whose servants are slaves, and whose wages is *eternal misery*.

The next thing that I would propose to your consideration is this; that as there are, as appears by this history, *legions* of evil spirits, so we are assured, for our comfort, that there are *legions* of good spirits much more powerful than the other, and always ready at God's appointment to succour those that shall be heirs of salvation.

When our Blessed Lord was assaulted by his enemies, St. Peter drew his sword to defend him; but Jesus bade him put up his sword, assuring him, that instead of twelve disciples to fight for him, he could, if he desired it of God, have twelve legions of Angels. And when Elisha was beset by the Syrians in Dothan, and his servant in a fright cried, "Alas! my master, what shall we do?" the Prophet answered, "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them." And immediately "the Lord opened the eyes of the young man: and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

Agreeable to which, saith the Psalmist,<sup>a</sup> "The Angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." And in another Psalm,<sup>1</sup> "He shall give his Angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways."

This being so, you see, good Christians, what folly it is, and want of faith, for a Christian man to be afraid of the Devil or his agents, while he takes care to put him-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. i. 14.

<sup>a</sup> 2 Kings vi. 15, &c. <sup>b</sup> Psalm xxxiv. 7. <sup>1</sup> xci. 11.



self and his concerns under God's protection. A witch cannot hurt you, but by the help of the Devil; the Devil himself is under God's command, and must have his leave, before he can destroy the meanest creature.

Do but trust in God, and pray for his protection, and all the powers of hell cannot touch you, nor any thing that belongs to you.

But then I must tell you, that the Devil may gain a power, though limited, over the bodies or goods of such people as are so ignorant or wicked as to have to do with his instruments; namely, charmers, witches, fortune-tellers, or the like. People do not consider this. If they can hope for ease from their pains, or any present advantage, they are little concerned whether it comes from God or the Devil. No man, who calls himself a Christian, ought to have to do *less* or *more* with such people and practices, lest he become a subject of Satan and his kingdom, while he thinks the least of being so.

I know that simple people have been persuaded to make use of these instruments of Satan, because they make use of some good words, as they say, or Scripture expressions; but so did the Devil himself, when he tempted our Saviour to fall down and worship him.

Christians should rather consider, that affliction cometh not out of the dust, (as Job speaks) but is the appointment of God, and not to be removed till God pleaseth, nor by any means but such as he hath ordained.

And if we consider, that though St. Paul had the gift of healing in an extraordinary manner, yet he was limited to exercise this gift as God ordered it, for he could neither remove *his own thorn in the flesh*, though he earnestly prayed to have it removed, nor Timothy's frequent infirmities, which he only advised him to help by a prudent use of wine and water.

So that afflictions are not always to be removed, even by miracles—never by charms, which are certainly of the Devil, who by this means would draw men from trusting in and looking up to God, to trust in vanities.

Another use which I would desire you to make of this history is this: Never to make a rash and wrong judgment of the misfortunes that befall other people. God may have ends to serve which we know not of; it would be rashness, perhaps, to say, that this people deserved such a loss and judgment more than any of their neighbours; but we may with safety say, that Jesus Christ did, in this judgment, teach his church, after a very sensible and affecting manner, that the Devil is a spirit of irresistible power when God lets him loose to do mischief; and that he is restrained by God so as not to hurt the vilest creature without leave.

You will learn from hence to abhor that great wickedness of wishing the Devil may take either man or beast. You see what mad work he can make, when he has his liberty. And though God may for his own glory restrain him, yet you discover, by your horrid wish, the most wicked disposition that the Devil can inspire any man with.

To conclude the whole: We have no way to be secure from this great adversary of our souls and bodies, but by being in God's church, under God's protection, constantly praying for his help, and that he would give his Angels charge concerning us, trusting in his power, and resisting the Devil and all his temptations.

And may our gracious God, who knows us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that we cannot always stand upright; may He grant us such protection as may support us in all dangers, and carry us through all temptations, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory now and for ever.



## S E R M O N XXII.

THE NECESSITY, AND THE GREAT BLESSING AND COMFORT, OF SECURING  
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE HOLY GHOST.

ROMANS viii. 14.

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.*

**W**HEN our Blessed Lord was to leave the world, he assured his disciples, that one should be sent *to supply his place*; to comfort them for his absence; to guide them into all truth; to bring all things to their remembrance, whatever he had taught them; to sanctify their persons, and bless their labours. By whose labours we, amongst many other nations, have been brought out of darkness and error, into the clear light and true knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ.

This indeed is a *mighty blessing*; but this is not all. This would not have answered the great love and design of God, to save his lost creatures: for such is the weakness and corruption of our nature, that though we should be convinced, even by miracles, of the truth of the Gospel;—though we should know the will of God never so well;—yet we are not able, of ourselves, to walk in the commandments of God. And therefore it was necessary, that the *same Spirit*, which enabled the Apostles of Christ to *convert* the world, should continue to guide, to assist, to defend, and sanctify, *all such* as by *their* ministry should be converted in the great work of their salvation; that is, *all such* as being convinced of the truth of Christianity do desire to walk worthy of that name and calling.

For it is too plain and sad a truth to be denied, that all are not Christians *indeed*, who yet own the truth of the Gospel, and are persuaded of the necessity of obeying it, and have embraced its profession. Not that the Holy Spirit denies his graces to any that are dedicated to him in baptism; but men thrust him from them; refuse to ask his assistance; grieve him by their evil deeds, and force him to forsake them, and to leave them to themselves, and to the government of evil spirits, who walk about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may be permitted to devour, finding them forsaken of God, and prepared for destruction.

Forasmuch therefore as it would be no blessing for men to be convinced of the truth

of the Christian religion, by considering the miraculous powers of the Holy Ghost, by which it was at first established, unless they afterwards live answerable to what that religion requires of them, (which they cannot possibly do, without the continual grace and assistance of that same Holy Spirit) the Scriptures therefore are very express in exhorting Christians to strive and pray for the graces of the Holy Spirit, that they may live as they have believed.

And that Christians may not be mistaken, and lay too much stress upon their being made in baptism *children of God, and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven*, without taking great care to live like children of so holy a Father, and like people who hope to go to heaven; the Sacred Scriptures, I say, have most particularly set down the *marks* and *characters* of such Christians as may hope for benefit by their Christian profession. “If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, (saith St. Paul\*) he is none of his.” “If we live in the Spirit, (saith he, in another place) let us also walk in the Spirit;” that is, if we pretend to be born again, let us live like people that are become new creatures. And in the words which I have chosen for a text, “As many (saith he) as are led by the spirit of God, they [and they only] are the Sons of God.” They only can call God *Father*, so as to be heard by him,—so as to have their prayers answered,—so as to be rewarded by him.

And that Christians may not fancy that they are led by the Spirit of God, when indeed they are not, the same Apostle<sup>m</sup> sets down, in plain terms, what are the fruits of the Spirit of God, or of one that is led by the Spirit of God. “The fruit of the Spirit is, *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, courtesy, goodness*, (or a readiness to do good) *faithfulness, meekness, temperance*” (or continence.)

From this it appears, that men are *not masters of themselves*. Led they *must* be, ei-

\* Rom. viii. 9. <sup>l</sup> Gal. v. 25. <sup>m</sup> Ibid. v. 22.



ther by the spirit and powers of darkness, or by the Spirit of God. It is for this reason, that God, for Christ's sake, has given us the earnest of his Spirit in baptism; with this assurance, that he who submits to be governed by his Spirit, and brings forth fruit worthy of such a favour, he shall still have greater favours conferred upon him; but he that is not careful to improve the graces God gives him, from him shall be taken away, even what was before bestowed upon him.

Now, if men, notwithstanding this caution given them, will be making experiments how far they may neglect their duty, without losing the earnest of God's Spirit;—if they will try to govern themselves by their own reason and wisdom, laying aside the laws of God;—why then they may, indeed, take themselves from under God's oversight and direction; but servants still they must be, and led *they must be*, by the spirit and powers of darkness; they only change masters, (for a master they *must* have) and how much for the worse, sad experience will soon shew!

It is for this reason that *humility*, and *care*, and *watchfulness*, are so much recommended in Scripture; lest Christians should grow conceited of their own wisdom and ability to govern themselves;—lest they should neglect the means of grace which God has already given them;—and lest, being often off their guard, the Devil should at last be permitted to take them into his kingdom and service; from whence they cannot return to God when they please, no more than a dead man can return to life by his own power.

And this, by the way, is the true reason why neither *advice*, nor *authority*, neither the *hopes of heaven*, nor the *fears of hell*, can prevail with some sinners to forsake the evil ways they have taken. They are not their own masters;—they are servants to one, who will not suffer them to return to their sober reason;—they have forsaken God, and God has given them up to a reprobate mind, *a mind void of judgment*; so that they commit all iniquity with greediness, yea, though they see their ruin attends it.

On the other hand, such as are led by the Spirit of God do experience his assistance in the whole course of their lives; enlightening their understandings, convincing their judgments, awakening their consciences, curing the perverseness of their nature, and filling their souls with all those graces and virtues which are necessary to fit men for heaven. Hence it comes to pass, that men who of themselves are not able to think one good thought, yet by God's grace and Spirit do very plainly perceive—the excellency of religion and piety,—the folly and unreasonableness of sin;—the happiness that attends

the one, and the misery that must be the reward of the other.

Hence it comes to pass, that a poor weak creature, assisted by the Spirit of God, is able to resist the prince of darkness with all his hosts of evil angels. Hence it is, that man, who is naturally proud and obstinate, is yet brought to humble himself before God, acknowledge his own nothingness, confess his sinfulness, and that he merits nothing but misery. Hence it is, that man, who is naturally blind and ignorant in the things which most nearly concern his eternal welfare, yet enlightened by the Spirit of God, can very readily apprehend divine truths, can see the wisdom, and goodness, and love of God, in all that he has commanded, or requires of us. And to give no more instances but this one, of the power of the Spirit of God upon those with whom he dwells, and who suffer themselves to be led by him; hence it is, that Christians are brought to embrace doctrines so very uneasy to flesh and blood, so very unacceptable to corrupt reason:—*Blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the poor in spirit; blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake. Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that use you spitefully.*

Well; though all these truths were delivered by the Son of God himself; though they were confirmed by infinite miracles; yet if God had not sent his Holy Spirit into our hearts, we might indeed have heard these doctrines, but receive them *we never could have done it*, much less have practised them. But by the assistance of God's good Spirit, all these things are made *easy* to the understandings, *acceptable* to the wills, and *possible* in the practice, to all true believers.

Now this great blessing, of the *fellowship of the Holy Ghost*, is so far from being given as a reward of any thing we have done, or can do, that it is bestowed upon us before we do any thing at all, namely, when we are received into covenant with God; for then, that is, at our baptism, we are made *children of God*,—*a new creation*,—*temples of the Holy Ghost*,—*and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven*. And our life after this, be it never so holy, is entirely owing to the constant *influence, guidance, and assistance*, of this Blessed Spirit.

And it is for this reason, that Christians are so often admonished not to look upon their own works as any thing in God's account *meriting our justification*; since, as God, for Christ's sake, forgives us our sins, so it is the Spirit of God alone, which enables us to walk worthy of such a favour all our days; shewing our thankfulness for the same, by our obedience; and glorifying God for his mercy to us, by an holy life.



Now; forasmuch as Christians are but too apt to fall into a *carnal security*, they are to be often called upon to try whether they have the Spirit of God dwelling in them, or whether they have not lost, or are in danger of losing, so necessary a guide?

But how must they do this? Why, they must have *such marks* as cannot possibly deceive any, but such as are *willing to be deceived*. We do not bid them, for instance, look to their own *inward experiences*, since even good men often lament their want of faith, even when they are supported by it. And many with little reason fancy themselves to have the Spirit of God, when a worse spirit governs them.

We must therefore tell Christians, that they have no way so sure of knowing whether they have the Spirit of God, as by considering the *fruits* the spirit which possesseth them produceth in them; namely, whether their great aims and designs are to be *happy in this world*, or to *please God*, and to secure the fellowship of his Holy Spirit unto their lives end. *This*, every body is capable of knowing, who will be at the pains of searching the bottom of his own heart. For if he finds that his thoughts are chiefly upon another world, and that *this* so affects his heart, that his endeavours after holiness are sincere; then he may be well assured *all is well with him*. He has the word of God for it, Rom. viii. 1, 16: "There is verily now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.—The same spirit beareth witness with our spirit, (or consciences) that we are the sons of God." That is, if we are led by the Spirit of God to walk worthy of him that hath called us, we may be satisfied in our minds, that we are under God's *protection, guidance, and favour*.

It now remains, that we consider how we may continue so; that is, how we may secure the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, which we received in baptism, unto our lives' end.

And first; though we owe all the grace which God has given us to his Holy Spirit, and must always depend upon him for the continuance of it, yet we must still use our best endeavours in the use of those means which God has ordained, in order to fit us for heaven. For certainly men take the most effectual way to deprive themselves of God's assistance, when they neglect to do what is already in their own power, that is, what God has enabled them to do, though it be never so little; for when a man does what he *can*, it is a sign that he is *sincere*. And therefore, at the same time that the Holy Scriptures bid us to depend upon God, they exhort us "to work out our own salvation;"

<sup>a</sup> Phil. ii. 12.

that is, on our part to do all that God by his preventing grace has convinced us we ought to do, and which by his assisting grace he will enable us *to do*, if we sincerely ask his help.

And secondly; that we may secure the presence and assistance of God's Spirit, we must be careful to mind his godly motions, exciting us to our duty, checking us when we are doing amiss, and comforting us when we do what pleaseth God. Not to do this is, as the Apostle speaks,<sup>o</sup> "doing despite to the Spirit of grace;" "resisting the Holy Ghost," as St. Stephen says<sup>p</sup> the Jews and their Fathers had done, which brought destruction upon them.

Lastly; we must above all things be careful not to grieve and provoke him to forsake us, by *sensuality*, by *uncleannefs*, or by *living in any known sin*; and even by an undue application to, and an affection for, earthly things, which, our Lord assures us,<sup>q</sup> *will choak the word*, and the Spirit, by which it becomes a means of grace, and it becometh unfruitful.

If to this we add our *sincere prayers*, out of a true sense of our own inability, and God's readiness to help us through the mediation of Jesus Christ; we shall then be secure of the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, being assured by our Lord himself,<sup>r</sup> that our heavenly Father *will give the Spirit to them that ask him*, as certainly and readily as any Father will give good things to his children that ask him bread, or what is needful for their life and well being.

And now, good Christians, you see the necessity of *Christian baptism*, by which we have the Spirit given unto us; without which Spirit it is impossible for any man to work out his salvation. You see the reason why very many, though they have received the earnest of God's Spirit in baptism, are yet as wicked as those that never heard whether there was any Holy Ghost or not. They have neglected his motions;—they have grieved him by their evil deeds;—they have forced him from them, and are become servants of another master, whose delight is in wickedness. You see therefore the necessity there is of *walking warily*, lest by adding one sin to another we provoke God to leave us to ourselves; for then you have heard who it is that immediately takes possession of us.

You see of what little use it is to be convinced of the truth of the Christian religion, if we do not seriously apply to the Spirit for grace to live as becomes the Gospel of Christ. Lastly; you see the danger of neglecting the means of grace which the providence of God

<sup>o</sup> Heb. x. 29.

<sup>p</sup> Acts vii. 51.

<sup>q</sup> Matth. xiii. 22.

<sup>r</sup> Luke xi. 13.

affords



affords us:—It is the ready way to be forsaken of God and left to ourselves.

To conclude then. Do we desire the satisfaction of knowing whether we are under the government of the Spirit of God? Why, we are to consider whether we are led by the Spirit of God; that is, whether the fruits and effects of that Holy Spirit appear in our lives and conversations. If, for instance, we love God, and endeavour to please him to the best of our power;—if we love our neighbour in deed, and in truth; that is, doing good as well as giving good words;—if we are just in all our dealings, doing to others as we would be dealt with ourselves;—if we deny our own wills, and resolve never to please ourselves by displeasing God;—if we are afraid of sin, and keep at a distance from it;—if we apply to God in all our necessities, and willingly submit to what his providence shall order for us;—why then we are sure these are the fruits of the Spirit, that he abideth with us, and will be with us, while we continue to walk in *this* way.

On the other hand:—If a man has cast off the fear of God; runs headlong into temptations; lives in the practice of known sins; is fond of every thing that may divert his thoughts from the care of his soul; why

then he may be sure of it, he is led by the Devil, and is in the way of perdition.

Let us therefore not flatter ourselves in a concern of so great moment. A wicked life is a sure mark that men do not belong to God. The Apostle speaks plain to this purpose: “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil; “whosoever does not righteousness is not of “God.”

In one word:—If we would secure the friendship and fellowship of the Holy Ghost, we must listen to him, and obey his godly motions; we must keep a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man. We must pray daily for his gracious assistance, and commit ourselves entirely to his guidance and blessing. And that we may not believe every spirit, we must still have an eye to the Word of God, established by miracles; by which we shall easily distinguish *his will* from the suggestions of our own corrupt hearts; we shall see the truth, be governed by it, and shall be secure from the fear of evil.

Now unto Him who sanctifies us, and to Jesus who has redeemed us, and to God our Creator, be all honour and glory for ever. *Amen.*

\* 1 John iii. 10.

## S E R M O N XXIII.

CHRISTMAS. EPIPHANY, &c.

THE REASON AND THE EXTENT OF GOD'S LOVE IN SENDING HIS SON INTO THE WORLD, AND THE OBLIGATIONS THIS LOVE LAYS UPON CHRISTIANS.

O DEUS, fons misericordiae, illumina amore tuo oculos meos, ut charitatem tuam erga nos immensam ego ipse agnoscam, et gratiae tuae delicias adeo degustem, ut mirabilia tui amoris ex verbis meis reluceant, ut ego, et populus qui me audiunt, hoc amore impleti, omnia ea, quae tibi displicent, abnegemus, et in imaginem tuam magis magisque transformemur. Concede haec propter Jesus Christum amoris tui filium. Amen.

I JOHN iv. 9.

*In this was manifested the Love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him; [that is, through faith in him.]*

EVERY thoughtful man has two things much at heart,—*How he may appease God, and how he may please him.* First; how he may appease God; for every man for himself knows, that he has done many things to offend him. Secondly; how he may live so as to *please* God; for we know by experience, that if men were left to their own inventions, they would take such ways to gain the favour of God, as would rather *provoke* his displeasure.

Now, God has made these two things known to us by Jesus Christ, whom he sent into the world for these very purposes,—*to reconcile us to God, and to make known to us the will of God;* that is, how we may live so as to please him. Or, as Zacharias expresses both these blessings, “That we, “being delivered out of the hand of our “enemies,” (and which had made us enemies to God) “might serve him without “fear,” (because we serve him as he has ap-

\* See John iii. 16. 16. Rom. xv. 17. 2 Cor. v. 18. \* Luke i. 74. 1 John iv. 19.

pointed



pointed us) "in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life."

In this (saith St. John) was manifested "the Love of God" (of God who did humble himself to behold such a sinful generation of creatures) "*towards us*;" that is, the whole race of mankind, who had no reason to expect such a favour, or that God should send to visit them, except for their iniquities.

And yet, such was the Love of God, that he sent—not an Angel, but—*his Son, his only begotten Son, his beloved Son*, into the world; that *we*, that is, the world to which he was sent; or, as St. John elsewhere expresseth it, all that believe in him *might have everlasting life*,—might be enabled to attain eternal life through faith in him.

Every serious Christian, who shall be convinced of this, will have reason to rejoice that God sent his Son into the world; and no reasonable body will blame him for it. But for people to rejoice they know not why; to be extremely pleased with the return of *this season*, [Christmas] without knowing, and without valuing, the blessing of a Redeemer; this is what makes many thoughtful Christians *sad*, when others are full of *mirth and jollity*.

To prevent this, I will set before you a short and plain account of these following things:

*First*; The reason of God's sending his Son into the world; namely, *that we might live through him*.

*Secondly*; We shall consider the *extent* of God's love in sending his Son, *that we might live*,—that as many as believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

*Lastly*; We shall consider, what obligations this love of God lays upon Christians.

I. Let us first seriously consider, *The reasons of God's sending his Son into the world*. The text says, in general, that it was, *that we might live through him*; that is, that we might not only escape those punishments of which our consciences were afraid; but also that we might be made happy beyond what we could either desire or deserve.

To give you a short, but plain account of this matter:—You are to consider, *that God made man upright*, that is, holy like himself; that while man continued so, he was happy; both in the favour of God, and in the peace of conscience which he enjoyed; but at last, through the malice of the Devil, and the disobedience of Adam, sin entered into the world, which has been the occasion of all the mischiefs and miseries that we meet with, or hear of. Particularly, there is one

John iii. 16.

most miserable effect of sin, that all mankind are sensible of, and that is, *the fear of punishment*. It being most natural for every man who knows he has done amiss, to expect to hear of it again. So that when the Psalmist saith, "My sorrow is continually before me; mine iniquities are gone over my head, and as an heavy burthen, they are too heavy for me;" he speaks not his own sense only, but the sense of every man living, whose conscience is awake, and under the guilt of sin.

And this is the very true reason why all mankind, ever since the Fall, have been seeking out the ways of appeasing God, and, if possible, of making their minds easy under the fears of his displeasure for the sins they had committed, and were daily liable to.

Now God, who foresaw all this disorder even before the Fall, designed, from the beginning, to redeem man from this sad condition of blindness, fear, and uncertainty.

And first, Christ was promised to the Fathers, to whom also the Law was given, to the end that knowing their sin by the law, and how unable they were to keep that law which their consciences told them was *holy, just, and good*; they might with more impatience desire the coming of Christ. And because he was to be "a Light to lighten the Gentiles," as well as "the Glory of Israel," God sent him at a time *when all iniquity did abound*, that men might see plainly that it was not for any works of theirs that he sent his Son into the world, but for his *goodness*, and for his truth's sake. And after men had sufficiently wearied themselves in seeking for peace and happiness, by ways of their own invention, and all to no manner of purpose; it was then that God sent his only Son into the world, *that men might live through him*;—that they might know how to live so as to please God, how to appease God when they have offended him, and how to secure his favour both here and hereafter: "In this the love of God was manifested."

In short; God's design being to recover man to a state of happiness, from which he fell by sin, there was no other way of restoring him to happiness, but by *holiness*.

The way God has taken to bring this about has been by sending his Son into the world, who being the *express image* of God, by Him we know *what God is*, and *what will please him*.

By Him, for instance, we know *the exceeding great Love of God towards men*; for God having from the beginning purposed to send his Son into the world, all the wickedness, all the provocations of men, could not divert his goodness and faithfulness from doing it.

By



By Him, we know that God is ready to forgive the greatest sinners upon their repentance, and return to their duty.

And whereas we are but too apt to fall, by Him we know that God is *able* and *ready* to support us by his grace; and that he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear, provided we ask his help sincerely.

That men may not vainly depend upon the Love of God without caring to deserve it, his Son has assured us, that God is *just* as well as *good*, and that he has *judgments* as well as *mercies* in store for such as shall deserve them.

And then that we may certainly know *what will please God*, he has given us a very *few, plain* directions in his Sermon on the Mount, contained in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of St. Matthew. There we learn, in what *true happiness consists*: Not in any thing the world is apt to doat on,—not in the abundance which men possess;—but in Poverty of Spirit,—in a godly sorrow for our own sins, and for the sins of others,—in meekness,—in hungering and thirsting after righteousness,—in mercy and loving-kindness,—in purity of heart,—in making peace,—and in suffering for righteousness sake.

And because He knew very well how hardly men would be brought to esteem these things, much less to strive after them, until they could be persuaded—that it is no great matter what a man's lot is in this world, provided he can but please God; he therefore chose to be born of mean parents, in a mean place and condition. He had neither house nor harbour, and yet he never repined; teaching us that this is not the world where we are to look for happiness. And being pressed with the bitterest sufferings, he still submitted to the will of God, giving us a rule how to behave ourselves when God suffers us to be afflicted. *Thus we live through him*; that is, by his example we learn what will please God. And in this was manifested the Love of God, in that he has suited this means of attaining happiness to the very meanest capacity.

It is not every body that can attain to any great measure of knowledge; but every body who hears the life of Christ, and believes him to be sent from God, who sees the miracles he wrought, and the example he set his followers, must be convinced, that he was assisted by a Divine Power;—that whatever he said was true;—that whatever he promised was certain;—and that whatever he did was worthy to be imitated.

From all which it appears, that the gracious God has dealt with us *as with reason-*

*able creatures*, and has made use of the most plain and powerful arguments and motives to make us *holy*, that we may at last be happy. He sent not one to force a law upon his creatures by the sword and bloodshed, but he sent his only Son, with *works* sufficient to shew that he came from God;—with offers of *pardon and grace* upon most merciful terms;—with *power to forgive sins*;—with *rewards and punishments*;—requiring nothing of us, but what he himself *in our nature* had performed and suffered, and what he would enable every faithful servant of his to undergo with *patience*, if not with *pleasure*.

By this time I hope you understand, that the design of the Gospel is to mend that disorder which sin has caused in the world. That this is to be done no other way, than by rooting it out, and establishing holiness in the room of it. That God sent his Son into the world for this very end, that is, to redeem us from death, *by redeeming us from our vain conversation*. And that we ought to value the love of God by the price of our redemption. And we shall still have more reason to do so, when we consider, in the second place,

II. *The extent of this love of God, in sending his Son into the world.* And indeed the Scriptures are very plain and express as to his matter:—"God (saith St. John, iii. 17.) "so loved the world, that he sent his Son, "that the world through him might be "saved." And that God was no respecter of persons in thus loving the world, we are assured by the Apostle,\* his will is, that *all* men should be saved. And St. Peter affirms, that even such as perish, through their own wilful disobedience, are of the number of those whom Jesus Christ came to save. "They denied the Lord that bought them;" that *bought*, and would have saved them, but they brought upon themselves destruction.

Nay; to take away all manner of scruple, and to apply this most comfortable truth to the consciences of sinners, who are apt to fear the worst, St. Paul speaks of this after a most convincing manner:—"As the sin of Adam (saith he) affected all his posterity, as by one offence judgment came upon all men to condemnation, so the merits of Christ were designed to redeem *all* the posterity of Adam; for "by the righteousness of one, "the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." As sure therefore as I am one of those who by the sin of Adam am become weak, corrupt, and wicked, so sure am I redeemed by Jesus Christ. And the sin that does so easily beset me directs me to Him who came into the world to save me.

\* 1 Tim. ii. 4.

b Rom. v.



This was the doctrine of Christ, and this he taught by his example.

The very persons who crucified him had an interest in the sufferings they made him to undergo; otherwise he would not have prayed for them that God would forgive them. St. Stephen followed his Master's example, and prayed for his murderers.—And the Church of Christ still continues to pray for *Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks*, holding *this truth*,—that the Love of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ, extend to all men who will lay hold of the mercy; “That whoever believeth in Christ shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

And by this charitable practice, our church endeavours to bring all her people to a godlike temper of charity and good-will for all who bear the image of God; and by this practice she endeavours to support the spirits of dejected penitents, who will have no reason to despair, since the greatest sinners are in a capacity of salvation.

We are obliged indeed to say, in a capacity to be saved; for the truth is, all men are not saved, that might be saved if it were not for their own wilful blindness, resisting the love and the counsel of God for their good.

Many will not hear and be made sensible of the danger they are in; others will not forsake their sins for any consideration whatever; and many even despise the very offers of pardon and grace. In all these cases, the Saviour of the world declares, that it is men's own fault if they are not saved. “Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.”

If people, when salvation is offered them, will notwithstanding unworthily abuse the mercy;—if men, to whom God has manifested himself, *will not* retain God in their knowledge;—if those that have been enlightened, and have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;—if they are again entangled therein, and are finally lost;—this is not for want of means to be saved,—but they will not be saved,—they will not seriously attend to the word preached,—they will not believe, at least they will not consider, the importance of a judgment to come,—nor will they submit to the conditions of attaining eternal happiness.

But then it must not be said—that God did not love them, that God did not desire their welfare, who has declared his Son to be the Saviour, not of some few only, but of *the whole world*. And therefore the account of his birth is said by the Angels, to be tidings of great joy *to all people*; that is, to all that can be prevailed upon, by the

goodness of God, by the love of Christ, by the labours of his Ministers, to receive him for their Lord and Saviour.

And now we come, in the third and last particular, to consider,

III. *What obligations this Love of God lays upon Christians.* For certainly God did not design that all this love should be lost upon us. He expects some return, some fruits of his Son's humiliations, and labours, and sufferings.

Shall I put you in mind how God, by the Prophet Isaiah, [ch. v.] reasoned with the people of Israel? “Judge, (saith he) I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.” The case was so plain, that he refers it to themselves: “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?”

Now the punishment of this ingratitude, this unfruitfulness, followeth: “I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up, trodden down, laid waste.”—And so it came to pass. You can any of you apply this as well as I.

To proceed, therefore:—The Love of God in sending his Son into the world, obliges us to three things especially. *1st*; To love the Father, who sent his Son that we might live through him. *2dly*; To love our Lord Jesus Christ, who condescended to come down to save us. And *3dly*; to love all mankind, for whose sakes, as well as for our's, he came down from heaven.

I. And first; *If God has shewn so great a love for us, we ought in return to love him again.* But do we find that it is so with us? So far from it, that it is with pain and unwillingness that we think of his favours; it is with difficulty we ask his mercies; and it is seldom that we thank him for them; and yet we say, *it is our duty to love him with all our hearts.* We know we love a thousand things better, and yet we are easy.

But what must a man do who knows this to be his case? Why; he must lament the blindness, the perverseness of his nature, which will not suffer him to love the very Author of his being, and well-being. He must pray God to increase his love; and must endeavour to lessen his love for the world. In short; we must do what *we can*, and God by his grace will supply the rest. Give God thanks for the blessings you receive;—submit patiently to all his dealings with you;—resign yourself wholly to his good-will and pleasure;—depend upon his word, upon his promises, upon his goodness;—and your love to God will increase daily.

and



and God will love *you* more and more, and will supply all your defects by the merits of his Son.

And that you may not be deceived, and think you love God, when indeed you do not; remember, *that love and obedience always go together.* That where there is not a desire to please God, and a fear to offend him, *there is no true love of God.*

II. *Our Lord Jesus Christ demands the next place in our love;* for it is only by Him that sinners have hope. It was He, who, though Lord of the whole creation, *took upon him the form of a servant*, that he might set us an example of humility—the most acceptable grace of God—and that he might effectually convince us, that this is not the world we were made for, and that in truth it is dangerous to have to do with it.

It is He, whose whole life, for our sakes, was made up of sufferings; that having borne all the infirmities of *our* nature, he might more affectionately pity and succour us, while we are in this vale of misery.

It was He, who went about doing good, that he might, after the most sensible manner, shew us what was most pleasing to God.

By Him we know God, *for he is the express image of the Father.* We know that he is good to all,—that his tender mercy is over all his works,—that he desires not the ruin of his creatures,—that he is long-suffering, of great pity,—for so was his Son our Lord Christ.

And when no other sacrifice would atone for the sins of the world, it was on *Him* all our iniquities were laid; to Him we owe our redemption, even the forgiveness of our sins.

And lastly; it is this same Jesus, whom God has exalted to be a Prince and a Saviour to all that come to God by Him; for to him the Father has committed all judgment. So that all our hopes of pardon, the acceptance of our prayers, the grace of God, the conquest of our enemies, all our comfort on earth, all our hopes of heaven, depend entirely upon our Lord Jesus Christ, and on what he has done for us. Well therefore might the Apostle say, “That if any man *love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed.*”

III. And because *He gave himself for the life of the world, we are therefore bound to love all mankind, because Jesus Christ did so;* not in word and in tongue only, but in deed and in truth. And that we may be more effectually engaged to do so, God has made of one blood all the nations of the earth; and all these being become equally the children of wrath, he has redeemed them all *by one Saviour.*

Shall we then think *any* unworthy of *our* love, whom God has thought worthy of *his*?

Let us have a care of making the same evil use of the favour of God, as we find the Jews did, who, because God called *them his own people*, could not imagine that he had any regard or concern for any other nation. And so narrow, so selfish a love had possessed that whole people, that when God sent his Apostles to, and poured his Spirit upon the Gentiles, they were amazed to find that God had granted repentance unto life to a people whom *they* had in their own thoughts given up to destruction.

Rather let us imitate the boundless goodness of God, who has embraced the whole creation within the arms of his Love. And our Lord Jesus Christ has made *Love* the badge of all his faithful members, and by which they are known to belong to him: Not a *selfish Love*, for such as think just as I do,—for such as will be governed by the reasons that prevail with me;—but Charity is a tender regard for the whole creation of God, loving the persons of those whose errors I cannot close with; pitying the blindness, bearing with the perverseness, praying for the conversion of those that I suppose to be enemies to truth and virtue.

In short; we have this commandment from God,<sup>d</sup> that “He who loveth God, love *his brother also.*”

And these are the great obligations which the Love of God lays upon all Christians.

And now let me lay before you (in a few words) some useful observations upon what has been said upon this subject.

When Christians hear such Scriptures as these, “That God sent his Son into the world, *that we might live through him;*” they are apt to mistake the meaning, and fancy that there is *now* no danger, since Jesus Christ has paid their ransom. Why now, this is not to *magnify*, but to *abuse*, the grace of God. Christ hath indeed redeemed us from the wrath to come, but then he must also redeem us from *all iniquity*, and “purify unto *himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.*”

In one word:—The life which Jesus Christ has purchased for us must be begun in this world. So that all our hopes, and happiness hereafter, depend upon our being made conformable to Christ in this Life: “That *our old man being crucified with him, the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.* That *as Christ was raised from the dead, so we also should walk in newness of life;*—that *we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness.*”

<sup>d</sup> 1 John iv. 21.

<sup>f</sup> Rom. iv. 4, 6.

<sup>e</sup> Titus ii. 14.

<sup>g</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 24.



You will observe, that our redemption is a work of mere grace. God sent his Son into the world, when there was nothing in us to move him to it but only our misery. Whatever pretence mankind had to the favour of God before the Fall, it was all forfeited; and this is the reason that the *free grace of God* is so much spoken of in the Gospel, that men may not arrogate any thing to themselves, but that we may be humble, and thankful, and obedient, to the Lord that bought us; that we may be concerned to please, and afraid to offend him.

And to all that are thus affected with the goodness of God, resolving by his grace to live according to his Son's doctrine and example; to such, one would use our Saviour's words, "rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven." But to such as rejoice they consider not why, the words of Solomon suit better their condition: "The end of that mirth is heaviness."

We shall conclude this discourse with what the Spirit hath said by St. Paul, to shew the great obligations we owe to God, in this dispensation of his mercy; who thus expresseth it, 1 Cor. i. 30: "Christ Jesus is of God made unto us *wisdom*, and *righteousness*, and *sanctification*, and *redemption*." He is our *wisdom*, by making known to us the will of God, and his glorious perfections; our *righteousness*, by satisfying in our nature the justice of God, and by restoring us to God's favour; our *sanctification*, by his Holy Spirit working in us true holiness, and by that separating us from an evil world; our *redemption* from the greatest of all slaveries, the slavery of the Devil, and the sins he tempts men to, and from a state of damnation.

O Jesus, for these mighty blessings, all love, and glory, and thanksgiving, be unto Thee, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, by us, and all that are partakers of these mighty favours.

## S E R M O N XXIV.

THE NECESSITY OF LOVING JESUS CHRIST AS OUR SAVIOUR, PRINCE, AND LAW-GIVER; AND THE TRUE MARKS OF SUCH A LOVE.

I COR. XVI. 22.

*If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema, Maran-atha;*<sup>a</sup> [that is, *accursed when the Lord cometh to judgment.*]

SAINT PAUL tells us, the verse before, that he wrote these words, and the salutation following, *with his own hand*, as a matter that it concerned them to take notice of. And, truly, it concerns all Christians to have some good assurance of this, *that they do indeed love the Lord Jesus Christ*, lest, when he comes to judgment, they should fall under *this dreadful sentence*, to be for ever separated from their Lord and Saviour.

The words are *plain*, and *positive*, and *full of terror*. And I have made choice of them, that I may at once awaken your attention, and put us all upon a most necessary enquiry, *whether our love be such as it should be?* For it is very certain, people may deceive themselves, and hope that they are Christ's faithful servants, and that they shew their love sufficiently, either by endearing expressions, or by their zeal for their own particular way of serving him, by standing up for the truths of the Gospel.

Now; though all these are worthy expressions of respect, yet they are by no means to

be depended upon as infallible marks of our love to Jesus Christ, because there have been people, in all ages, who have gloried in the name of Christ, have contended for the privileges of the Gospel, have spoken of Jesus Christ in words full of love and respect; and yet have been utter strangers to *that love*, which should have appeared in their *lives* as well as in their *professions*.

As for "such as deny the Lord that bought them,"<sup>b</sup> charity will not suffer us to believe that there are any such present. But then there are too many, who (as we said just now) are under a delusion without knowing it.

*First*; There are many, for instance, who love Jesus Christ as he is *their Saviour*, who do not love him as he is their *Prince* and *Lawgiver*.

*Secondly*; There are many who love him, *but not heartily*, because they do not know their *own misery* without the blessing of a Redeemer.

*Thirdly*;

<sup>a</sup> See Ps. xlv. 10. Matth. x. 37. John viii. 42. xiv. 15, 21, 24. Eph. iii. 17. vi. 24. Phil. iii. 8. 2 Tim. ii. 12. 1 John ii. 15. <sup>b</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 1.



*Thirdly*; There are many, very many, who hope that they may love *Jesus Christ*, without renouncing the *love of the world*.

*Fourthly*; There are too many who, mistaking the marks of a love for Christ, mispend their time in vanity, and misplace their affections.

*Lastly*; It is impossible to love *Jesus Christ* as we should do, unless we obey his commands.

These, therefore, are things fit to be made plain, and these are the particulars, which, by the favour of God, I shall now insist upon.

I. We shall first consider *the delusion of those who love Jesus Christ as a Saviour, but do not love him as he is their Prince and Lawgiver.*

When the love of *Jesus Christ* is first announced, people look upon it as a most *reasonable duty*, and the most *easy* to be received: they consider him as a *Redeemer*; "that he *"came into the world to save sinners;"*—that by *his means* God is *reconciled to us*, for he laid down his life for us, and the *Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all*;—that he is our *Advocate* with the Father, our *Great High Priest*, making intercession for us continually;—that "we are all the children of God *"by faith in Jesus Christ;"* "and if children, then heirs, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."<sup>m</sup>

These are all such glorious privileges, purchased for us by Christ, that it seems impossible for any Christian not to love him. And we do not wonder that the Prophets, foreseeing his *incarnation* and appearance in the world, called him *the desire of all nations*;—that *all nations should call him blessed*;—that *all the families of the earth should be happy in him*.<sup>n</sup>

But then we are apt to forget, that *this Saviour*, whom we love and admire, is our *Prince and Lawgiver*;—that we are his *subjects*, and bound to obey all his laws;—that he is to be our Judge, and will call us to a very strict account, if we pretend to be his servants, to *love him*, and *do not the things which he commands us*. And this makes a strange alteration in our affections; when we call to mind what our Redeemer expects from us; what strict laws this Prince has given for the good government of his subjects; and upon what conditions he will be a *Saviour* to us.

These thoughts are apt to lessen our joys, and we are almost ready to say, in the words of the Prophet Isaiah, liii. 3. "there is no beauty in him that we should desire him." And it is then we find that a matter of diffi-

culty, which *before* we thought the easiest duty in the world. And indeed it is the hardest thing to flesh and blood to *love him sincerely*, who commands us, *for his sake*, to renounce all that is dear to us in this world;—to deny one's self a great many things which we are very passionately fond of;—to keep under the body, and bring it into subjection;—not to conform ourselves according to this present evil world, for which we are *sure to be reproached*; and yet to esteem *this reproach* of Christ before all worldly advantages;—to glory in nothing so much as in the Cross of our Lord *Jesus Christ*, by which we are taught to despise all that the world doats on.

These are the commands of *Jesus Christ*, concerning which, hear what our Saviour himself saith:<sup>a</sup> "Ye are my friends, ye are they that love me, if ye do whatever I command you."

When, therefore, we read the history of our Lord's life with a sensible pleasure;—when we admire at his wonderful humility in the manner of his birth;—for the Son of the Highest to be born of a poor Virgin, in an obscure town, in the worst part of that poor town,—to live a private life,—to want many of the conveniencies even of *such a life*;—to see him refuse to be made a King, content to be called an impostor, a dealer with the Devil;—suffering himself to be betrayed, to be scorned, to be crucified; and all this to satisfy the justice of God for his sinful creatures that had offended him. No Christian can hear these things without being sensibly affected.

But then we should consider the meaning of this wonderful order of Providence; that it was to convince us, that this is not the world we were made for,—that it is no great matter how poor we are born, how many things we want, how much we are despised, what severe things we suffer, provided we do our duty in that state of life in which the Providence of God has placed us;—forasmuch as the happiness which God has prepared for them that love him will make sufficient amends for whatever they want or suffer here.

To love *Jesus Christ*, therefore, is to love his *humility*, his *patience*, his *self-denial*, and to imitate them; and this will dispose us to love him as our *Prince and Lawgiver*; to love his *commands*, and to *obey them* to the best of our power; without which all other instances and expressions of love will signify very little. "If ye love me, (saith Christ himself) keep my commands." This is the end of all religion.

We dedicate our children to Christ in *Baptism*, that they may be bound betimes to keep his laws; they promise to do so them-

<sup>k</sup> 1 Tim. i. 15. <sup>l</sup> Gal. iii. 26. <sup>m</sup> Rom. viii. 17.  
<sup>n</sup> Hag. ii. 7. <sup>o</sup> Ps. lxxii. 17. <sup>p</sup> Gen. xxviii. 14.

<sup>q</sup> John xiv. 15.



selves at *Confirmation*. We renew these vows every time we receive the Lord's Supper; we pray to God in his name; we read his life, and remember his sayings; and *all this*, that we may be prevailed on *to keep his laws*. And we plainly delude ourselves, if we hope that any other expressions of our love will excuse us from *obeying his commands*. "Not every one that faith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."

What; shall we say then, that there are but few that love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, and that the rest are *anathema*? We dare not pronounce this sentence: that must be left till the Lord comes to judgment. In the mean time, it nearly concerns us all to prevent that sentence, and to possess our hearts with such a love of Christ, as may at once affect our hearts, and influence our lives. To obtain *this*, it is necessary, above all things,

II. *That we be thoroughly convinced of our misery, without the blessing of a Redeemer.*

To be *born in sin*, and to be *the children of wrath*; this we are taught as soon as we can speak. But who considers the *meaning* of these words, even while we *feel* the sad effects of the sin of our first parents?—The words of the text offer us an instance of our misery.

It is unquestionably true, that God made man to *love* and to *serve* him. Our first parents before the Fall did so undoubtedly; and it was their highest pleasure to *love* God and to *obey* him. Do we find it *now* so with us? Very far from it. We think of him with pain and difficulty;—we obey him unwillingly;—we are backwards in asking his blessings, and we easily forget to thank him for his favours;—we boldly break his laws, and we are not sufficiently afraid when we have done so.

What a strange disorder is this! That a creature made to love and to depend upon God, should love every thing better than God;—should find an uneasiness in God's presence;—should take delight in such things as displease God;—and should think it a burden even to ask a favour of him!

This plainly shews, that men, by nature, do not love God;—that they have lost the image of God, in which they were created;—that God is angry with them;—and that it is only for Christ's sake that ever he would be reconciled to them.

A man must be blind not to see that *this* is the condition of every man, and that it is a miserable one without the blessing of a Redeemer; especially if we consider, how much worse we have made our condition, by

the many actual transgressions of our lives. So that we may truly say, in the words of Isaiah, lix. 2, "Our iniquities have separated betwixt us and our God, and our sins have hid his face from us." The consequence of which must be *shame*, and *sorrow*, and *fear*, lest we should be for ever miserable. And miserable we should have all been, had not Jesus Christ undertaken to redeem us. It is to him we owe our redemption, even the forgiveness of our sins. "God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."

Whoever lays these things to heart, and endeavours to possess his soul with a sense of its misery, and with the love of Christ in reconciling us to God, will easily see the blessing of a Redeemer, and will have one of the strongest motives to love him with all his heart. Our Lord would convince us of the truth of *this*, in that most affecting parable recorded by St. Luke: "There was a certain creditor, which had two debtors: the one owed him five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Which of them will love him most? Certainly he to whom he forgave most."

I shall conclude this particular with the observation of a very *learned* man,\* to this purpose: "Our Redemption being a work of as great mercy, *at least to us*, as was that of our creation, we could not but love our Redeemer even as much as God that made us. It was therefore absolutely necessary that God should redeem us, otherwise we should have been obliged to have loved a creature *equal* with God our Creator."

III. We come *now* to another delusion of Christians, who hope that they may *love Jesus Christ well enough without renouncing the love of the world*. To prevent this, our Lord has expressly told us, "that no man can serve two masters:" and all thoughtful people have found it so by experience. For, if the love of the world rule in our hearts, the love of Christ will find little entertainment there. And we are required to love him *with all our heart*, on *purpose* to cure us of an immoderate love for the world, which would otherwise take up all our *thoughts*, and *time*, and *affections*.

Was it not for this very reason, as was observed before, that our Lord made choice of a life of poverty, to convince the *poor*, that they are not ill dealt with; that they are free from a great many temptations, which would hinder them in their way to heaven?

\* 1 John iv. 9.      \* Chap. vii. 41, 42, 43.

\* Mr. Malbranch, in his Christian Dialogue.



Was it not to convince the *rich*, that they are in the midst of snares and dangers; that they have need of more grace to secure them from falling; and that the greatest satisfaction that this life can afford them will not make amends for the loss of heaven?

People are justly offended when they see a Clergyman set his heart upon the world; and they conclude, truly, that such a man *cannot love the Lord with all his heart*. But then they should consider, that the same affection for the world in *any other Christian* will extinguish the love of Christ; and that all Christians are equally bound to renounce the love of the world, who desire to love God as they should do.

In short; it is not for nothing that Jesus Christ has said so many severe things against riches, and the love of the world. It is because he knew how hard it is to be innocent in the midst of abundance;—to enjoy the good things of this world without loving them too well;—and how apt people that *have them* are, to *trust* in them, to *forget God*, and to set their hearts upon them. He has therefore assured us, that they are no mark of God's favour;—that people may want them, and be the happier for it;—that such as have lost them may easily make up that loss, by securing a treasure in heaven; and that this is the use which they ought to make of such visitations of Providence.

I consider what people will say to all this. They will ask, for instance, who it is that does not love the world? It is a question that ought to be answered, because the Spirit of God says expressly, that the love of God and the world are inconsistent; and yet we are bound to live in the world, to take care of our families, and not to neglect our business.

A man therefore may live in the world, and may live like a Christian, provided he avoids all things that are sinful, or the occasions of sin; and that he does not set his heart upon what he has or labours for.

Our blessed Lord lived in the world, and complied with the laws and customs of the world; and *there was nothing singular in his life but his holiness*.

A good man, therefore, will not let the hurry of business so far gain upon him as to make him forget *that this is not the world he was made for*. If the world favours him, he will receive its favours with a fear and jealousy, lest he should be corrupted by them; he will not think himself one jot the better for these outward advantages, nor others the worse for wanting them; he will deny himself a great many things, which his circum-

stances might furnish him with; he will be always ready to do good to such as are in misery; and by a temperance in all things will be ever prepared patiently to endure what the Providence of God shall order for him.

These are all Christian duties, and yet they would not be required of us, if it were not possible (by the grace of God) to perform them acceptably in the midst of worldly business. And the only fault is, when people forget, that they are accountable to God,—that they depend upon him,—that they are hastening to another world,—and that their hearts should be there. And so they content themselves with some bare outward respects and testimonies of their love to God, with a form of godliness without ever feeling the power thereof; and this they call a love for their Saviour.

IV. We shall therefore be obliged to consider, *what are the true marks of a sincere love for Jesus Christ?* Let us hear what our Saviour has said in answer to this question, John xiv. 15. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." And ver. 24, "He that loveth me not, keepeth not my sayings."

These words are so plain, that one would think here were no room for a mistake. What other meaning can they have but this,—That obedience to the laws of the Gospel is the surest sign of our respect for Jesus Christ, and the only condition of favour with God? Upon which I cannot but make this *just observation*: That the great difficulties of a Christian life lie in *this*, in mortifying our corrupt affections, in weaning our hearts from the love of the world, and uniting them to Christ;—not in knowing what our duty requires of us; for this is so plain, that *the wayfaring men, though never so simple, cannot err therein*. Whereas Christians, for the most part, contrary to all good sense, spend the most of their thoughts, and time, and pains, in getting still more knowledge; and look upon the *practice* of Christianity as the easiest thing in the world.

This is a delusion which is found amongst all sorts of Christians. The unlearned excuse themselves from a great many duties, on account of their ignorance. And the more learned do very often place religion in being able to say a great many things about it; and in the mean while, these plain truths are not taken notice of: *That the love of Christ is the shortest way of knowing our duty; and that the keeping his commands is the surest testimony of our love for him*.

If this were well considered, Christians would be more concerned to avoid and to resist temptations; to pray often for grace to do their duty; to examine their hearts and their



their lives, and to amend where they have done amiss; and their knowledge would certainly increase with their obedience. So saith our Saviour verse 21st of this chapter: "He that loveth me," that is, keepeth my commands, "shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and manifest myself unto him."

To conclude, therefore, this particular:—Christians are not to judge of the sincerity of their love of Christ so much by the pleasure they take in knowing his laws, in admiring his goodness, in speaking well of his ways, as by the effect these produce. If we hate that sin which cost him so dear;—if we learn from his humility, his patience, his self-denial, to imitate him, to set our affections on things above;—if we read his Gospel with a sincere desire to know his will, and with a full purpose of heart to keep his sayings;—Lastly, if we find that our love stirs us up to an honest discharge of the duties of our calling, perfecting holiness in the fear of God;—why then we have the witness in ourselves, that our love is such as it should be. But if it does not do *this*, it is no more than an *idle notion*.

But how shall we possess our hearts with such a sincere love? Why; that is what I would say in a few words. We must know that we want a Saviour;—we must beg of God to give us an inward feeling of our own misery;—we must live up to that measure of grace and knowledge which God has given us;—we must consider who this Redeemer is, what he has done for us; that he has merited the pardon of our sins if we repent and forsake them,—that he is continually interceding for all those that come unto God by him,—and that the consequence of all this will be, (if it is not our own faults) we shall be eternally happy.

I do not say that all this is to be done without care and pains, and a great deal of trouble. It is a difficult thing to possess our hearts with a sincere love of Christ; because we must first renounce all other affections contrary to the love of our Saviour. But then this convinces us of the truth of Christianity, which requires of us such things as no man ever could come up to, unless assisted by a divine power. And if an infidel will say any thing against the Christian Religion, he must say one of these *two* things, either that there never was any man who lived up to his profession, which would be a bold saying indeed; or that God does bless and enable those that love and serve him, to do his will.

In short; when we consider who it is that has redeemed us,—*no less a person than THE SON OF GOD*;—what it is he requires of us;

namely, to avoid such things as would make us for ever miserable;—what favours he has purchased for us; namely, that he has made our peace with God, and has obtained for us a title to eternal happiness. If we consider his wonderful condescension in taking our nature upon him; in submitting to all the hardships of a miserable life, and a more miserable death, in order to deliver us from death eternal. If, lastly, we consider, that we are commanded to honour the Son even as we honour the Father;—that whatever we ask in his name, God will give us;—that our present and future welfare depends upon his intercession with God for us. Whoever lays these things to heart will be convinced, that Jesus Christ has indeed merited our love;—that we cannot *think* of him too highly;—that we cannot *speak* of him too worthily;—that we cannot *worship* him too reverently.

How unhappy then are those people, and how careful should all good Christians be not to hearken to them, who would lead us to *think*, and to *speak*, and to *believe*, and to *act*, as if there was danger of loving their Lord *too much*, of honouring him too highly, and of serving him too religiously. Christians should beware of this, lest they should at last be tempted to deny the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction!

To conclude:—It is no wonder, that there are persons to whom Jesus Christ and his Gospel are no way acceptable: it cannot possibly be otherwise. Can a man, (for instance) who will not see his own misery, think that he has need of help? Can a man of pleasures love that Gospel which bids him not love his pleasures upon pain of damnation? Can a man of the world think *that* a wise doctrine, which so often tells him, that those that trust in riches can hardly go to heaven; and that it is hard to have riches and not to trust in them? In short; can people heartily embrace a teacher, though come from God, who forbids them a thousand things which they are passionately fond of, and which they will have, let what will follow?

And was it not this that made Jesus Christ a stumbling-block to both Jews and Gentiles, when he first appeared in the flesh? They came to see and hear him with their passions about them; and they could see nothing in him worth admiring, besides the wonders that he wrought.

It is just so with all those at this day, who embrace a Saviour without resolving to leave their sins. They may speak of him with respect, but it is impossible they should love him. They may rejoice with his church for company,



company, but they will have no reason for it in the end. For this same Jesus, who came to save us, and to deliver us *from the wrath to come*, must *first* deliver us from *all iniquity*; "from this present evil world;" "from our vain conversation."<sup>u</sup> If we will not suffer him to do this, instead of a Saviour, he will be our Judge to condemn us to eternal misery.

Now, the short of what has been said is this:—Jesus Christ has merited our sincerest love. If we desire to love him sincerely, we must endeavour to do what we believe will please him. We cannot do this, without denying ourselves in many things which we are very fond of. We shall want an especial grace to do this, for of ourselves we are not able. To this end, Jesus Christ has

<sup>u</sup> Gal. i. 4.

<sup>w</sup> 1 Pet. i. 18.

obtained for us this *signal privilege*, that we may call God *Our Father*,—a favour which no people ever had before the coming of Christ. So that we may go to God with an assurance of being heard, as a child goes to his father.

If we make use of this privilege, and pray to God in the sincerity of our souls, and a sense of our misery, he will hear us, and, for his Son's sake, he will justify us, will change all our dispositions, and we shall love him, and his Son Jesus Christ, as our only good and our portion for ever.

Now, unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever.—And "may grace be with all them that love "the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." *Amen.*<sup>x</sup>

<sup>x</sup> Eph. vi. 24.

## S E R M O N XXV.

### T H E C H R I S T I A N ' s A R M O U R .

E P H E S . Vi. 10 — 19.

*Finally, my Brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole Armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole Armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with Truth, and having on the Breast-plate of Righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace; above all, taking the Shield of Faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the Helmet of Salvation, and the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God: praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all Saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel.<sup>y</sup>*

**T**HERE are three things, which are the ruin of too many Christians. *First*; A confident presuming upon their own strength. *Secondly*; An utter ignorance of the enemies they have to deal with. *Thirdly*; A wilful neglect of the means which God affords them for overcoming those enemies.

Christians have warning of these things given them betimes. One of the first things they are taught is, that of themselves they are not able to keep the commandments of God, or to serve him without his special grace. They have at their Baptism renounced the Devil, who is the declared enemy of God and of all good men; and they have been put into possession of the means of working out their salvation. And yet

people perish, because they will not lay these things to heart.

The portion of Scripture which I have now read to you will be very proper to put you in mind of these things. You will see, in the first place, how necessary it is *to distrust ourselves*, as we hope to be safe. Then you will see what great reason we have to be upon our guard, upon account of the enemies we have to deal with. And lastly; you will see what provision our gracious God has made for our defence against all the assaults of our adversaries. These are *matters of great importance*, and I pray you will consider them along with me.

"Brethren, (saith the Apostle) be strong "in the Lord, and in the power of his

<sup>y</sup> See 2 Cor. iii. 5. 1 Pet. v. 1, 9. 1 John v. 4. Epistle for 21st Sunday after Trinity.



"might;" that is, depend not upon yourselves, but on God's assistance, who is mighty to save.

Learn, in the first place, to *distrust* yourselves; acknowledge your own poverty and weakness; renounce all pretence to wisdom, and self-government; and remember, that it is much better to be made sensible of our own frailty, by giving credit to God's word, (which tells us that of ourselves we are nothing) than to feel it sadly, by being permitted, by the just judgment of God, to fall into some *grievous, shameful, or destructive crime*, to convince us of the folly of *depending upon ourselves*.

In one word; men are naturally *proud, self-conceited*, have too good opinion of their own *reason*, of their own *resolutions*, and of their own *strength*; so that God is forced to leave them often to themselves, to make them see their error.

Was not this the case of St. Peter? Our Lord had told all his disciples, "without me ye can do nothing." St. Peter, forgetful of this, and finding himself disposed to stand by his master even to death, confidently declares, "Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in anywise." And we all know how this ended.

And be assured, good Christians, thus it will be with every man living, who shall trust in himself, and not in God alone. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." Get an entire confidence in God, by considering his *power*, his *wisdom*, and his *goodness*; that he knows all our weakness, and our wants; that nothing is impossible with God; and that he is so infinitely good, that he desires our happiness more than we ourselves do. He had compassion upon us, even when we were enemies and sinners;—he has delivered us out of the kingdom and slavery of the Devil, and put us under the government of his only Son our Lord Christ, who governs us by his *Laws* and by his *Spirit*, and will infallibly bring us to heaven, if, denying our own wills and desires, we depend upon the *goodness, grace, and power* of God, to defend us against our enemies. For, saith the text, "we wrestle not only against flesh and blood," that is, with men like ourselves, "but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

These are the enemies we have to wrestle with; namely, against the Devil and his angels; who, in opposition to God, hath set up a kingdom in this world; whose subjects are wicked men and unbelievers, who, by the power of evil spirits, are kept in darkness, neither seeing nor fearing the danger they are in.

In which sad condition, and slavery, we and all mankind had continued to this day, had not the most high God set up a kingdom and power mightier than that of Satan,—even the kingdom of his Son our Lord Jesus Christ; who hath called us out of darkness unto the light of the Gospel, and who will enable all his faithful subjects and servants, to resist all the power of the enemy, to avoid his malice, and to overcome his forces. But then we must, as the Spirit directs us, "put on the whole Armour of God, that we may be able to stand" (our ground) "against all the wiles of the Devil;" especially "in the evil day," that is, in the time of *trial and temptation*: If then we want our *armour*, our *defence*, we shall certainly fall before our enemies.

What this armour is, the Apostle sets down very particularly in the following verses. And it behoves every Christian to remember them, and to be provided with them, as he hopes for salvation. And they are, *Truth, Faith, Righteousness, Peace, Hope, and Prayer*. These are called *the whole Armour of God*; these being necessary for every Christian who expects to overcome.

You must, in the first place, "have your loins girt about with truth;" that is, you must be fully persuaded of the truth of the Christian Religion which you profess; remembering, that the Gospel is God's *Word and Will*, given unto us by his *own Son*, whom we are commanded to hear and obey by a voice from heaven, and who confirmed his Gospel by the greatest miracles; by which you are instructed what you must do to inherit eternal life. It teaches you, for example, that you are to love God above all things, and to *show* your love by keeping his commandments;—that you are to love your neighbour as yourself;—to do good to all;—to forgive those that have injured you;—to speak evil of no man;—nor to defraud or wrong any body. It teaches you to set a true value upon your own soul, by assuring you, that the whole world ought not to tempt you to lose it;—that sins of *impurity, rioting, and drunkenness*, will infallibly shut you out of heaven;—and that such as are meek and humble, and fearful of offending, are in the way of salvation.

In short; this is the *Word of Truth*, which a Christian ought to have always about him, as near his heart as the very girdle about his loins. This is the rule by which he is to live, and by which he is to be judged;—the very best armour he can have against errors of all kinds: For having this at hand, he will see, that he must not be led by the authority or customs of the world, nor be frightened by its terrors, by its reproaches, or scorns; he will see what is most to be *desired*, what most



to be feared, what to be avoided. In one word; by consulting this Word of Truth, his heart will be firmly established against all the wiles of the Devil, which would lead him to error and deceit.

II. The next defence of a Christian is, *the Breast-plate of Righteousness*; that is, a conscientious discharge of all the duties of our calling, which, in the day of trial, will secure a Christian from such assaults of Satan as tend to lead him to despair.

And indeed an *holy life* is of the same use to a Christian, that a breast-plate is to a soldier to keep off blows in the day of battle. "For, though all our righteousnesses (as the Prophet speaks, Is. lxiv. 6.) "are but as filthy "rags," yet having the testimony of a sincere desire to please God, God for his Son's sake accepts of our work and our persons, and then the enemy is at a loss what to say against us.

A Christian will not say, I am *righteous*, and therefore I am *secure*; but he will say, I have lived in all good conscience, I have been *sincere* though I have not been *perfect*; and Satan himself knows, that God, for Christ's sake, will accept of *this* instead of a *perfect obedience*.

III. The next provision which a Christian ought to make for his security is, *that his feet be shod with the preparation of the Gospel of Peace*; that is, that we walk in the practice of that *peaceableness* and *charity* recommended in the Gospel, which will make our Christian course more safe and less troublesome. For *as anger stirreth up strife*, and being indulged too long, or too much, will give place or opportunity to the Devil to stir up adversaries against us; so *meekness* and *long-suffering* will preserve us from many temptations and persecutions, as did the soldiers' shoes of brass defend *them* from the gall-traps laid in their way to hinder their march.

This is called "the Wisdom which is from above," that is, from heaven; which teacheth us to be gentle in our behaviour, meek in our words, peaceable in our lives, *not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrarywise blessing*.

These are the arms of a Christian. By these he is to overcome the adversaries of his soul; he is "to overcome evil with good; "and, as much as in him lieth, live peaceably with all men." By which he will escape infinite temptations and dangers.

IV. But above all the rest, faith the text, *take the Shield of Faith*,—of faith in the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, *wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked*; that is, render all the Devil's attempts useless and of no force.

God has not left us to the uncertainty of our own reasonings, about things which concern our souls and eternity; but he has given us his Holy Word, and in that has declared, what is truth, what is reasonable, what is necessary to be believed, what to be done, in order to our happiness. Fix then *this* in your heart, that *this* is God's word, and that every syllable is true and will most certainly be made good; and this will defend you, as a shield, against the delusions of error, against the profane arguments of wicked men, against the snares of your own deceitful heart, and against the assaults of the Devil.

For instance:—If he shall at any time tempt you to *despair*, by suggesting how weak you are, and subject to sin, your Faith will tell you, (that is, God himself tells you) that *his grace is sufficient*;—that He who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead can raise us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness.

If he would tempt you to *presumption*, your Faith will tell you, what your Lord and Master said to his disciples:<sup>a</sup> "When "ye shall have done all those things which "are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which "was our duty to do." And, "Let him "that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest "he fall."

If you are tempted to *sins of impurity*, your Faith will tell you plainly, "That no "whoremonger, nor unclean person, shall "inherit the kingdom of heaven;<sup>b</sup> but shall "be cast into outer darkness, where the "worm dieth not, and the fire is not "quenched."

If you are tempted to *fraud*, or *injustice*, or *oppression*, your rule will tell you, "That "you must do violence to no man;<sup>c</sup> nor defraud your brother in any matter; because "the Lord is the avenger of all such."<sup>d</sup>

If you are tempted to *covetousness*, you will remember the words and caution of Jesus Christ,<sup>e</sup> "How hardly shall they that "have riches enter into the kingdom of "heaven." And, "What will it profit a "man, if he should gain the whole world, "and lose his own soul?"

If the Devil would tempt you to *drunkenness* and *sensuality*, you have this plain caution given you, that if you live under the guilt of these sins, Christianity will be of no advantage; for the Christian Religion teacheth us,<sup>f</sup> "to deny ungodliness and "worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world."

If you are *poor*, and the Devil would tempt you to *discontent*, to *envy*, or to *better*

<sup>a</sup> Luke xvii. 10.<sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. x. 12.<sup>c</sup> Eph. v. 5.<sup>d</sup> Luke iii. 14.<sup>e</sup> 1 Theff. iv. 6.<sup>f</sup> Luke xviii. 24.<sup>g</sup> Mark viii. 36.<sup>h</sup> Tit. ii. 12.



*your condition by unjust ways*; remember the words of Jesus Christ:<sup>a</sup> "Blessed are ye poor, for your's is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are ye that hunger now, for ye shall be filled." And that poor Lazarus, when he died, was carried by the Angels into Paradise, while the rich man went to hell,<sup>1</sup> there to be tormented. Having food and raiment, be content therewith; for "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,"<sup>m</sup> saith the Lord Almighty.

Lastly; if the enemy of your soul would *cast a damp upon your spirits*, by suggesting that you cannot please God by all that you can do; why then support yourself by such truths as *these*: That "God is not unrighteous;" that he has given us leave to call him *Father*; that a *Father* will not cast off his children who desire to please him, though sometimes they do what they should not; and, that "He that spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not with Him also freely give us all things?"<sup>m</sup>

V. To proceed: The next piece of Spiritual Armour is *the Hope of Salvation*, which will serve for an *helmet* or *head-piece*. And well it may; for what can discourage him whose hope is in the Lord of Hosts; "who has laid up for them that fight the good fight of Faith, an immortal crown of glory that fadeth not away?"

In all our tribulations, therefore, let us, as Moses had, "have respect unto the recompence of reward:"<sup>m</sup> Let us take our Blessed Lord for an example, "who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of God."

VI. To these we must add, *the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God*; by which we shall be able rightly to judge betwixt good and evil, and defend ourselves against the stratagems of the Devil, as our Lord did in the wilderness, who, when he was tempted of Satan, still silenced him with a sentence of Scripture, which the tempter flew from as a coward would from the sword of a conqueror.

Lastly; To all these we must add *prayer, supplication, and perseverance* in these; by which we shall be able either to *prevent* or *remove* all the evils we are subject to, or have the grace to bear them with satisfaction or patience.

All the fore-mentioned graces are the gift of God; from *him* we must ask them, and from *him* we must receive them, if ever we have them. But then we must learn to ask them with the *humility* of creatures that

know their wants, with the *reverence* of people who know their distance, and with the *earnestness* of Christians who know they are undone unless their petitions are granted.

And whoever with these dispositions lays his wants before God, lamenting his own miseries, and earnestly begging the graces of God's Holy Spirit to support him in his Christian warfare, shall certainly find the good effect of his prayers. For, saith our Lord Christ,<sup>p</sup> "if ye, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit" (and in that all good things) "to them that ask him?"

And now, good Christians, having explained to you a portion of Scripture, which ought to be very well understood and remembered, I would desire you to consider, whether you can imagine, That Christianity is an idle state of life, or that any man can hope to get to heaven without *concern*, and *care*, and *pains*, and *striving*,—without taking the armour which God has provided for our security?

You see what enemies you have to deal with: *Satan*, a very malicious and powerful spirit;—the *World*, a very deceitful, bewitching adversary;—and lastly, an *Heart* desperately corrupt and wicked.

Verily, if our gracious God had not pitied our condition, and had not provided us with suitable security against such enemies, not one man living could have been saved. Shall we then, because God has been careful of us, be careless of ourselves? Shall we live as if there were no danger, because God has provided us with arms to oppose our enemies?

Believe it, good Christians, it is not for nothing that the Apostle exhorts us "to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling."

Whoever would continue Christ's faithful foldier and servant unto his life's end, and inherit eternal life after death, must *watch*, and *pray*, and *believe*, and *hope*, and *strive*, and *patiently endure* hardships, or his Christian profession will signify very little to him at the last.

It is not sufficient "to renounce the Devil and all his works,"—to profess to believe in God, and to promise to serve him all our days,—unless in good earnest we do so, and become Christians in *deed* as well as in *name*, with which too many, God knows, content themselves.

Let me therefore set before you the *character of a true Christian*—one who is in the way of salvation;—that every one of us may

<sup>a</sup> Luke vi. 20, 21. <sup>1</sup> Luke xvi. <sup>b</sup> Heb. xiii. 5. <sup>1</sup> Heb. vi. 10.  
<sup>m</sup> Rom. viii. 32. <sup>n</sup> Heb. xi. 26. <sup>p</sup> Heb. xii. 2.

<sup>p</sup> Luke xi. 13.



see how far we come short of it, that we may amend what is amiss in us.

A true Christian then is one whom the Spirit of God has awakened into a deep sense of his own misery;—who can have no rest, until he knows *what he must do to be saved*;—and being convinced that he must pass through a corrupt world, infinite errors, and powerful enemies; in his way to heaven; his heart is filled with a godly fear, and distrust of himself, (knowing, by sad experience, his own weakness) till at last he finds he *must* perish, unless God assists him with means of overcoming his enemies. He sets himself therefore in good earnest to know the will of God; that is, by what means God will enable a poor, weak, sinful creature to get the better of so many adversaries, which he is sure to meet with in his way to happiness. And having learned, that the Gospel is the rule by which we must live, because by it we must be judged;—that a firm faith in the power of God for overcoming of all difficulties;—that a lively hope in his promises;—that a sincere endeavour after righteousness, and a peaceable behaviour towards all men;—that these are the means which God has ordained for our safety;—he therefore labours, with all his might, to put his whole confidence in God, never presuming upon his own strength;—to have always in his eye the prize of his high calling;—to order his life according to the rules of the Gospel;—and, as much as may be, to be at peace with all his fellow-travellers.

These are a Christian's Defence; with these he conquers his enemies, and with these he grows every day stronger in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

But then, to preserve and to increase his Faith and other graces; he diligently reads or hears God's Word, (for Faith comes by hearing;);—he earnestly prays God to increase his faith, his hope, and his charity;—he keeps a careful watch (like a good soldier of Jesus Christ) over his appetites and passions, that Satan may not get an advantage over him;—and by this means, and the aids

of God's Spirit he is secure from fear of evil.

And be assured, good Christians, that it is well worth your while to be at this pains, whether you consider the happiness you shall attain, or the miseries you shall escape.—Heaven and Hell are words in every body's mouth, while few lay it to heart what is meant by the one or the other. But one or the other of these two must be the portion of every man; so that it mightily concerns every man to look to it, lest that be his portion which he least thinks of.

Now, God having mercifully furnished us with means of securing us against the worst that can happen, our duty and interest is, to make use of those means with the seriousness of people that hope to be saved;—with the concern of people that see their danger among so many temptations;—with the cheerfulness of people who hope for eternal happiness;—and lastly, with the courage of Christians who have the Almighty for their helper.

By this, good Christians, we may, any of us, make a judgment of ourselves, whether we are in the way of salvation or not. If in truth we are, why then the care of our souls will take up much of our thoughts, and put us upon ways, and resolutions, and contrivances, for doing what we know is necessary for our eternal welfare. If, on the other hand, our hearts are full of the world, and all our thoughts and endeavours tend that way, why then depend upon it, we are not in the way of life, and we ought not to be easy under such circumstances.

And since we are encompassed on every side with dangers, and exposed to temptations both from within and from without, let us not depend on our own strength, but beg continually of God to keep us resolute and constant to the vows that are upon us: And then God will increase our faith, our hope, our confidence, and all other graces, which are necessary to bring us to heaven;—whither the good Lord bring us all, through Jesus Christ, &c.



## S E R M O N XXVI.

THE NECESSITY OF COMING TO SOME CERTAINTY WHETHER WE ARE IN THE WAY OF SALVATION OR NOT.

○ Holy Spirit of Grace; I implore thy assistance, that I may speak upon this important subject, so as to be understood, so as to touch the heart, so as to edify those that shall hear me. And grant that I may never forget to try and examine my own Faith by those marks which I propose to others; and that I may be an example in Faith and Life; for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

2 COR. xiii. 5.

*Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the Faith;*<sup>a</sup> [that is, *Whether ye be true Christians, and in the way of Salvation;—whether your Lives be according to your Profession.*]

**M**Y Christian brethren! I am going to lay before you the absolute necessity, as we hope for heaven, of coming to some certainty, whether we are in the way of salvation or not.

Every body must own, that it is a matter of great concern for a man to know, whether his Faith is such as it should be,—such as will please God,—such as will influence our lives, and fit us for heaven. I need not, therefore, use many words to prevail with you to attend very seriously, to what you are going to hear.

One cannot, in charity, but conclude, that any one of you would part with his life, sooner than he would renounce his Faith and his Christianity. This being the general persuasion of all Christians, that whoever renounces his Faith, renounces all hopes of salvation. And so indeed he does. We have the Word of the Son of God for it: *He that believeth not shall be damned.*

But then let us have a great care of deluding ourselves, by fancying, that because we would not for all the world renounce our Christianity, that therefore we are such Christians as we should be. For he only is a true Christian, who believes as he should do, and leads a life agreeable to his faith.

Now; this ought to put every one of us upon examining ourselves, in very good earnest, *whether we be in the Faith*; that is, in other words, whether we be Christians in deed and in truth, as well as in name? By doing this, we shall either have the comfort of knowing that we are in the way of happiness; or else we shall see our danger, which through the grace of God may awaken us, and put us upon a new course of life.

In order to this, we need not examine into the many disputes among Christians, to settle our Faith and our Religion. We have a rule of Faith, which will infallibly lead us to heaven and happiness, if our life be but answerable to our Creed. But that which I would propose to you, is a much surer way of knowing whether you are sound in the Faith; that is, by examining, *whether your life and conversation be such as becometh the Gospel of Christ?*

If a man's life is bad, his faith cannot be such as it should be; if a man's life is truly Christian, it is a good sign that his faith is so too; that therefore which I would most earnestly press upon you, and which I would charge myself with, is this:—*First*; to examine every man himself, and consider the great truths which we know, and profess to believe. And *secondly*, to examine very particularly what effect *this Faith* has upon our lives?

To begin with what we know and believe concerning ourselves; that is, that we are a race of sinful creatures, sadly fallen from the condition in which we were *most certainly* at first created;—that we have within us the seed of every sin whatever;—that we are prone to evil continually;—that we are *by nature the children of wrath*;—and that, as such, God can take no pleasure in us.

Will it not be expected, that every one, who knows and believes this, should be very humble, and very thankful to God, who did not overlook lost mankind when they had brought themselves into this sad condition.

In the next place, we profess to believe, that we are in this life *in a state of trial*, in order to mend our corrupt nature, that we

<sup>a</sup> See Matth. vii. 21, 22. John xiv. 1. Acts xxiii. 1. Rom. viii. 16. 2 Cor. v. 7. Gal. vi. 3, 4. 2 Tim. ii. 19. James ii. 17. 1 John iii. 21.



may be capable of *that happiness* for which God at first created us.

Will any Christian, who professeth to believe this, and that he is utterly unfit for heaven until his nature be mended, will he, notwithstanding, sit still, and be unconcerned, and lose this time of trial, and defeat the gracious designs of God, and live only to make his condition worse, by contracting evil habits, and offending his Maker continually?

Every Christian *must see*, that such a belief, and such a life, are most hateful to God; and that such a Christian (if he will call himself a Christian) is in a much worse condition than the most abandoned Heathen.

We all believe, and know for certain, that all mankind are under the righteous sentence of death; that this sentence is sure to be executed, but at a time we know not of; and that, when we die, we shall either be very happy or very miserable for ever and ever.

Now; will any Christian, who professeth in earnest to believe this, live as if he were never to die; or will he think it best to endeavour to lose the remembrance of death, and of what must follow, by diverting himself with other fooleries, by the hurry of business, or by bewitching pleasures?

Is this the behaviour of thoughtful people? Very far from it. You will be convinced it is not, if you will go and see a serious Christian labouring under any mortal ailment, which he is sure will put an end to his life in a month's time, or perhaps sooner: you will find such a man very serious, very indifferent for all the profits or pleasures this world can afford him; resolving to do every thing that may recommend him to the favour of God, whenever he shall die; and you would count him worse than a madman, if you should find him otherways disposed—if you should find him under no concern for his soul, but by all manner of ways diverting his thoughts from what is sure to befall him, whether he thinks of it or not.

And yet the generality of Christians will not consider, that this is their own case.—They *believe*, they *know*, they *are sure*, they must die, and sooner perhaps than they imagine. The Gospel, which they say they believe, tells them what *for certain* must follow; either eternal happiness, if they have led good lives, or eternal misery, if they die unconverted: And yet they put the thoughts of death far from them, because they will not prepare for it; at the same time they would die with fear, if they did not hope to be saved.

But be assured of it, Christians, that no man must flatter himself with these hopes.

He only who is convinced of his own misery and danger, through the corruption of his nature, and understanding, by his Christian faith, the way to get out of this sad condition; he only who can sincerely resolve—I *must* not, I *dare* not, I *will* not, be any longer indifferent how I lead my life; I will, through the grace of God, live by faith; I will endeavour to *know* what God requires me to do, what I may hope for if I strive to please him, and what I am to fear, if I continue to provoke him by my sins.

Every Christian, who thus believes, resolves, and lives accordingly, is in the way of salvation.

We come now to consider what we believe *concerning* God, that we may know whether our Faith is such as it should be.

We believe that God is infinitely great and good; and that we stand indebted to him for every thing we *have*, or *value*, or *hope for*.

Now; let us consider, if we were half so much obliged to any man on earth, how highly should we value him; how dearly should we love him; how much should we think of him; how should we strive to please him; and how should we be troubled, when we should be so unhappy as to offend him? Why now, Christians, if you thus *believe*, if you thus *value*, if you thus *love*, and *desire to please* God, and are careful not to offend him, your *faith* hath its saving fruits; it is such as it should be.

To proceed:—You believe of God, that he is *most holy*; and that as such he cannot but be displeased with every thing that is impure or wicked. Fix this truth in your heart; and your faith will keep you at the greatest distance from all sins of impurity and uncleanness, and from all temptations that lead to them; especially when the same faith assures you, that such sins, if not bitterly repented of, will not only shut you out of heaven, but will cause you to have your portion with unclean devils.

You profess to believe, that God is *infinitely just*, and that he hates all *injustice*, *oppression*, and *wrong*. Now; if you really believe this of God, you will never suffer yourself to be led, through *covetousness*, *malice*, or *revenge*, to injure any man living.

We all profess to believe, that God sees every thing that passes in the world; that the very thoughts of our hearts, our most secret designs, are known to him; and ought not every Christian who believes this, to *live* and *act* as having God the constant witness of his conduct?

Lastly; we have the liberty, through faith, to call, to apply to, this *great*, this *good*, this *just*, this *holy* God, as to a *Father*. A most glorious



glorious privilege this, provided we live so as becomes the dutiful children of so good, so great, so holy a Father; provided we resolve, with those mentioned in the Book of Wisdom, [ch. xv. 2.] "We will not sin, knowing that we are accounted thine." And are we not under the greatest obligations to do so, when, by our own confession, he can reward or punish men beyond what they can conceive?

So that if our Faith in God be such as it should be, we should part with any thing, as dear as a *right hand* or a *right eye*, rather than displease, rather than provoke, this great, and good, and holy God.

We now come to examine our Faith in JESUS CHRIST; that we may see whether our faith be right, by the fruits it produceth.

We profess to believe what Jesus Christ has made known to us, "That no man can come unto God, but by him;" *He being THE WAY, THE TRUTH, and THE LIFE*; that is, the author of the *Way*, the teacher of the *Truth*, and the giver of *Life*. "That God has given him power over all flesh."<sup>o</sup> That, therefore, as we believe in God, we must believe also in Him. For, that it would be but an uncomfortable article of faith, for a sinner to believe in a God who is holy, just, and powerful, and who hateth all iniquity, if he did not know how to make his peace with him.

We believe, therefore, in Jesus Christ, who took our nature upon him, and has made our peace with God, by suffering, in our stead, what we for our sins had deserved. He has also prevailed with God to accept of our repentance, if sincere; to give us all necessary assistance to do our duty, and to accept of our best endeavours, (instead of a perfect obedience) in order to our being made eternally happy.

Let us now examine our Faith upon this article of our Creed; let us consider how our hearts and lives are affected with this exceeding great love of Christ for his poor creatures. Does this love of Christ, as the Apostle speaks,<sup>1</sup> does this love of Christ constrain us? Does it constrain us to consecrate our lives to him, who, by his death, has redeemed us from death eternal? Does our love for Christ constrain us to take him for our *Pattern*, for our *Lord*, our *Master*, and *Teacher*? If it does, we shall receive his Gospel as the Word of our salvation; we shall observe the *laws*, the *rules*, the *ordinances*, which he has given us, as the only means to secure us from perdition. Does our Faith, as the same Apostle speaks,<sup>2</sup> work by love? Does it appear by works of love and

charity? Does the love of Christ constrain us to imitate his sufferings, to take up the cross daily, and follow him as he requires us to do; that is, to deny our corrupt inclinations; to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts; to resist all inclinations to sin; and to subject our will to the will of God, by steadfastly purposing to do whatever we believe will please him? Does the love of Christ, and what he has done and suffered for us, constrain us, not to be ashamed of him, his word, his humility, and sufferings, in this untoward, unbelieving generation; nor to set a greater value upon the opinion and friendship of men, than upon the friendship of God and Christ? Will our faith and love constrain us, to confess Jesus Christ, to follow his precepts and example, and to suffer for his sake, and to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel, even before those that despise it?

Let us ask ourselves again, Will our love of Christ, and our Faith, constrain us, with Moses,<sup>3</sup> to look upon the riches, pleasures, and idols of this world, as nothing, in regard of the recompence of reward which Christ hath purchased for us; or, with St. Paul, to count them but loss that we may win Christ? Do we, by faith, set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth? Is our conversation such as becomes the Gospel of Christ?<sup>4</sup>

If we find, upon examination, that we do indeed love the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Laws which he has given us, then we may depend upon it, that we are within the covenant of grace, [mentioned Heb. viii. 10.] by which God has engaged to put his law in our minds, and write it in our hearts, to give us a new heart, and a new spirit.

If the knowledge and belief of these things do not affect our hearts and our lives, it is a sign our faith is not such as it should be, and that our salvation is not much regarded by us. A too sure sign of this is, when we see Christians turning their backs upon that very ordinance, whenever it is administered, which Jesus Christ himself appointed on purpose to keep up the remembrance of what he has done and suffered for us; that our own death, whenever it shall happen, may be a comfort to us, and when nothing in this world, nothing but a firm faith in Jesus Christ, can support or comfort our dying spirit.

What we believe concerning the HOLY GHOST, to whom, with the Father and the Son, we are dedicated in Baptism, is this, That he is the cause of all that holiness in Christians, which must fit them for heaven and happiness. And that, as we hope for

<sup>o</sup> John xiv. 6.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14.

<sup>2</sup> John xvii. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ga v. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Luke ix. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Heb. xi. 26.

<sup>6</sup> Phil. i. 27.

these



these, we are every day of our lives to pray for his gracious assistance, his guidance, and blessing. And this we are to do in a more especial manner, that we may continue true members of the church of Christ; as becomes members of so holy a society; that believing the *forgiveness of sins*, we may never despair of mercy, having so powerful an advocate as Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost to assist us to perfect our repentance. That being by the same Holy Spirit assured of a *Resurrection*, we may never forget, that we shall come forth from the grave just as we go into it, either objects of God's wrath or of his mercy.

How shall we know that we believe these truths as we ought to do; that our Faith is such as will save us? why, as we know a tree,—by its fruits.

We profess to believe, that our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. No man of common sense will *abuse*, or *profane*, or *defile* a church, because he considers it to be a place dedicated to the honour of God. Now, our bodies are more the temples of God, than our churches; they are consecrated to God, to his glory and service, in baptism. And if after this we defile them, by *uncleannefs*, by *intemperance*, or by any other base or filthy use, the Holy Ghost will forsake them, and we shall become the temples of Satan.

A Christian, who lives by Faith, will make a better use of this temple of the Holy Ghost; he will, in his heart, apply to him upon all occasions, and beg of him to increase his graces, to shew him the way in which he should go, to defend him against his spiritual enemies, to make him every day more holy, that he may be capable of being more happy when he dies. He will beg this Holy Spirit to give him a love for, and an understanding of, those Holy Scriptures, which he himself caused to be written for our comfort and salvation. He will beg of him to preserve him a true and living member of that Holy Church, out of which, in the ordinary way of providence, there is no salvation. He will give him hearty thanks that he has made him a member of that holy society, where there is a communion of all good things, where we have a share of all the prayers and blessings which God vouchsafes to his church throughout the whole world. And, because he is sensible of his daily sins and failings, he will pray for the forgiveness of his sins every time he is sensible that he has done amiss. And knowing assuredly, that the same Spirit, which raised up Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead, will raise up our mortal bodies; he will most earnestly and often beg that good Spirit, that he may lead such an holy life, as that he may die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory.

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These are the truths which we profess to believe. That we may not deceive ourselves, let us examine our Faith by the fruits it produceth in the ordinary duties of life.

Now; Christians are represented in Scripture, as a people who by Faith know God, and the duty they owe to him, as well as the duty they owe to themselves and others, which are all very plainly set down in Scripture. It is impossible to consider this, without some melancholy reflections, when one sees too many as ignorant of these things, and as little concerned to know them, as if nothing depended upon them.

When one sees people praying for the pardon of their sins, for grace to amend their lives, for deliverance from eternal misery, and for the joys of heaven, with the indifference of people who are not much concerned whether their prayers are heard or not: When one sees them as fond of the world, as if they were sure never to leave it; or that God had no better inheritance to give them hereafter. Such Christians, to be sure, do not live by Faith, nor think that they are in the way of ruin.

Every Christian who lives by Faith must be able to say, I will not, *by the grace of God*, live in any known sin whatever; I will not be careless or indifferent how I lead my life, how I spend my time, how I spend my estate; I will not dishonour God, or my Christian profession, by an idle, useless life; in all my dealings with others, I will set this command of God before my eyes, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*; because I know and believe, that this is one of those two commands on which my salvation depends. I will not, therefore, want to be compelled to give every man his due, or not to hurt my neighbour. I will, (will every faithful Christian say) I will make conscience of doing the least wrong; of using any deceit or fraud; or of taking advantage of the ignorance or necessities of others. If I have done wrong to any man, I will make him restitution; and, as for such as are my enemies, I will forgive, and give, and love, as becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ.

As to the duty which I owe to myself, I will consider, that the first and great duty is, to take care of my soul; I will therefore, (saith a Christian who lives by faith) I will take especial care to mind those rules of the Gospel, which are absolutely necessary to fit me for heaven. Such are, *self-denial*, *patience*, *humility*, *purity*, and *charity*, how much soever they are neglected by the generality of Christians, as if they were no longer Christian duties. And as I pray daily that God's will may be done; for myself, I will endeavour to resign my will to the will of God in all the dispensations of his Providence.

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dence. And, forasmuch as the promise of seeing God is made to the pure in heart, I will endeavour to keep my heart from every thing that may defile my soul, and grieve that Holy Spirit by which I have been sealed unto the day of redemption. Lastly; (will every faithful Christian say) I will keep a watch over myself, that I may not resist or forget those good purposes which the good Spirit of God puts into my heart.

Such a faith, and such a life as this it is, Christians, that must recommend us to the favour of God; and to be easy in our minds upon any other terms, is to be in the way of perdition without knowing it. These things we must do, or give up our hope of heaven. For, as sure as God is true, and his word certain, none must go to heaven but the *good, the devout, the piously-disposed, the obedient, the sober, the chaste, the just, the honest, the religious* Christian.

Let us not then, my Christian brethren, let us not content ourselves with the bare name of Christians, and with shadows of religion and piety, without striving after that holiness without which no man must see the Lord.

You see plainly, that to be a Christian, and a true Christian, are two very different things. A true Christian, knowing that the want of a lively faith is the occasion of all the wickedness we meet with in the world, therefore begs this grace of God, with all the earnestness of his soul; he studies, he attends to, the truths of the Gospel, as that which must make him wise unto salvation; he resolves, that what he learns there he will believe, let what will be said against it; that what it requires, he will observe and follow, and avoid what it forbids; never consulting the way of the world, its customs, its favours, or its frowns. By doing which, he secures the favour of God, his grace here, and happiness hereafter.

On the other hand; they that live at all adventures, in a general forgetfulness of God, of their duty, and religion, without feeling any thing of its power; such people, under the name of Christians, are in truth unbelievers; and as such will be rejected of God, and will be reserved for a punishment dreadful to be named, however little they consider and think of it.

In short; God has given us a law by which he will judge us. By *faith* we receive this law; and by this we are to judge what our condition is like to be hereafter, whether happy or miserable.

That we may make this judgment impartially, let us consider what our thoughts will probably be, when we come to die. Whether, for instance, we shall not be under a

most terrible astonishment, when, reflecting upon our faith, and comparing it with our past life, it shall appear that we have lived in a plain neglect of what we profess to believe, and what we knew to be our duty. Or whether, upon comparing our life and our faith, we shall have the comfort of having lived by faith, repented of our errors, made our peace with God, and lived to bring forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

One of these two will be the case of myself, and of all you that hear me; how soon we know not; but it highly concerns us to think of it, lest the night come when no man can work, before we have finished the work we have to do.

My design, you see, Christians, has been to put you upon considering and examining into the truth of your faith, and the state of your souls. By the short hints which, for the sake of your memory, I am going to give you, you will see who *is*, and who is *not* in the way of life and salvation.

All such as fear God, and are afraid for themselves, on account of the corruption of their nature;—such as are truly sorry for having offended so gracious a God and Father, and resolve to do so no more;—such as receive Jesus Christ as their Lawgiver, Saviour, and Judge;—such as strive to be holy in their lives, as God who hath called them is holy;—such as do watch, and purpose in their hearts to do nothing knowingly which may displease God:—These have the principles of grace and life in them, and are in the way of life everlasting.

While such as are wilfully ignorant of God, and of the principles and duties of Christianity;—such as are not sensible of the corruption of their nature, and the danger they are in on that account;—such as see not, nor are sensible of the blessing of a Redeemer;—such as are best pleased with such company and pleasures as divert the thoughts of what must come hereafter;—such as live under the means of grace, without being bettered by them, whose hearts are set upon the world and its idols:—All these are in the way of certain ruin, though they will not think of it, though they will not believe it.

From all which it appears, how Christians are to judge of the truth and sincerity of their faith, even by the manner of their lives.

If a man fears God, he will be afraid to do any thing which he believes God has forbidden him;—if he loves God, he will desire to please God;—if he believes God to be the fountain and giver of all good, he will pray to him for all the good he wants and desires;—if he believes that God ordereth all things with infinite wisdom and goodness,



goodness, he will be pleased with all God's choices for himself and others.

Let no man, therefore, flatter himself that he is a Christian, who does not do the things which Christ has commanded,—and who will not learn from the example, from the meekness, humility, patience, and self-denial of Jesus Christ;—he who will not be persuaded that this is the only way to be restored to the favour of God, can neither be happy in this world nor in the world to come.

To conclude all that I have to say upon this subject:—As Christians, we have the greatest obligations upon us to lead very serious, very holy lives. We are blessed with the true knowledge of God; we have his own Son for our *Master*, and *Teacher*, and *Protector*, and *Saviour*, and *Mediator*, and *Advocate*; we are received into his family by Baptism; we have the Holy Ghost to assist us, and an interest in all the prayers

made in his holy church throughout the world; we know and believe that we shall rise again, (if we have passed this life of trial as we know we ought to do) we shall rise to enjoy a life of happiness unspeakable and everlasting.

What can our hearts wish for, what can we desire more? Yes, O Jesus, this one thing we desire and beg, that we may all have the grace which Thou alone canst obtain for us, that we may have grace, to lay the things which we believe most seriously to heart, and that our lives may be answerable to our faith.

Grant this, O Lord, for thy mercy's sake, and for the sake of thy poor creatures, whom Thou hast redeemed with thy most precious blood; that we may give to Thee, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, glory, and honour, and praise, and thanksgiving, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N XXVII.

### THE GREAT DUTY OF WORSHIPPING GOD.

R E V. IV. 10, 11.

*The four and twenty Elders fall down before Him that sat on the Throne, (that is, before God) and worship him that liveth for ever, and cast their crowns before the Throne, saying, Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.\**

**H**ERE is, good Christians, an heavenly Pattern set before you: here is the manner how the blessed inhabitants of heaven behave themselves in the presence of God. They fall down before him with all humility, *even they that wear crowns*; and, in token of the great difference there is betwixt God and the greatest of his creatures, "they cast their crowns before his throne;" acknowledging that he only is worthy to receive *glory, and honour, and power*; for it is he who has made all things, and it is by his will and pleasure alone that they continue in being. From all which we are to learn two things especially:

*First*; That whenever we come into God's house, *which is his presence*, we are (*after this heavenly pattern*) to express our reverence for God after the most becoming manner.

*Secondly*; That we should take notice of, and consider, the *wisdom, and greatness, and goodness* of God in the works of the creation;

and then we shall be convinced, that he is worthy of all the duty and reverence that we can possibly pay him.

I. The first thing we are to learn from these words is this, *that whenever we come into God's house, (which is his presence) we are to express our reverence for God after the most becoming manner.*

And first; "Though God (as the Apostle saith) "dwelleth not in temples made with "hands;" though the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; though a man may be sure to be heard wherever he prays to God in the sincerity of his heart; yet there are some places in which God is said to be present in an *especial manner*. Thus, for instance, the Temple was called *the house of God, a house of prayer*; that is, the place where men were to offer their prayers and thanksgivings. And, God is said to record his name in all such places as are regularly dedicated to his more immediate

\* See Ps. xix. 1. xciv. 6.

† Acts vii. 48.

service;



service; and promises to meet his people there, and bless them; "Mine eyes and mine heart," (saith God) "shall be there perpetually."

So that you see how foolishly people speak, when they say, that they can pray as well at home as in the church; that they can read a sermon as well themselves as go to hear one.

But are they sure that God will hear the prayers that are offered to him in contempt of his holy ordinances? Are they sure that God will give his blessing to what they read at home, when they despise *his* house, *his* service, and *his* Ministers. And if the holy Angels of God, which are our guardians, are in the house of God attending upon the faithful while they are at their devotions, in what a condition are all such as are absent without reason? Why, in truth, they are very much exposed to the malice and attempts of the Devil, who is continually wandering about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour; that is, whom he may be permitted to devour, having no good Angel to protect them.

In short; the Church is the house of God, the gate of heaven;—the place where God will hear his people's causes and complaints, —the place where he dispenses his blessings in greatest abundance,—the place where *his* Ministers attend, to instruct the ignorant, to comfort the afflicted, to pray for all. So that all who expect God's mercy and blessing ought to go to God's house. But then, as they hope for his blessing, *they ought to behave themselves in his presence with respect and reverence.*

When we are to go before our betters, we very naturally consider how we may do it after a handsome manner, for fear of provoking them to anger, instead of obtaining their favour. If we are to ask their pardon, we do it with all marks of humility;—if we ask them a favour, we do it with submission to their good pleasure;—if we go to thank them for favours received, we endeavour so to behave ourselves, as that it may appear we are really sensible of the obligation laid upon us. And this is what God expects from us, as well as our betters. He expects, for instance, that creatures, which cannot subsist one moment without their Creator's blessing, should not think it too much trouble to ask his blessing;—that sinners, who are for ever undone without his pardon, should ask his pardon with all humility;—that people who live altogether upon his favour, should own their dependence upon him after a sensible manner;—that people who own his power, should be afraid of him;—that such as acknowledge

his wisdom, should shew that they do so;—and that such as partake of his goodness, should express their sense after the most natural way; that is, at least with as much concern as men come before, speak to, behave themselves in the presence of their betters.

I know very well, what foolish people are ready to say to this. They say, for instance, that though *men* expect all this from people below them, yet God does not; that God sees the heart, and if that be right, that is all which God requires of us.

I will shew you that it is not, and that God expects an outward as well as an inward worship;—that God will be offended with our indecent behaviour as well as our betters; and that he will judge us according to that sense we have of our duty towards men above us. "A son (saith God) honoureth his father, and a servant his master: If then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear? and if ye offer the blind or lame for sacrifice, is it not evil? Offer it unto thy Governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts."

By this you see, that God is as jealous of his honour as any prince on earth can be;—that he is concerned even for the *outward service*, which men pay him. And though all the beasts of the field are his, and the cattle upon a thousand hills, as the Psalmist speaks; though the most perfect sacrifice is of no value in the sight of God, but as it is offered in obedience to God's commands, yet God would have a sacrifice as perfect as may be; and he will be offended if his worshippers shall bring him the lame or the blind.

Agreeable to this, he expects we should pray to him for what we want, and give him thanks for the blessings he every day bestows upon us. He sees with what affections we do this, and will be offended with our insincerity; he will also be offended with our irreverence, even as much as a father or a master would in reason be with the disrespect of a son, or the ill behaviour of a servant.

*Put off thy shoes from off thy feet*, was God's command to Moses, when he was in God's presence, a way of expressing the greatest respect. And this is so natural, that St. Paul does suppose,\* that if an infidel should come into a congregation of believers, and should there be convinced, that God is in truth amongst them, he would immediately fall down and worship God; there being so strict a correspondence betwixt the soul and body, that our hearts are no sooner affected with any thing, but it presently appears in

\* Exod. xx. 24. and xxix. 42.

\* 1 Kings ix. 3.

\* Malach. i. 6, 8.

\* 1 Cor. xiv. 24.



some outward signs—of fear, or joy, or reverence.

Nay, we may add farther, that an outward reverent behaviour is of use even to create an inward sense of God, and of the duties we owe to him. Thus the Priests, in Joel,<sup>a</sup> are directed *to weep between the porch and the altar*. At another time they are commanded to put sackcloth upon their loins, and ashes upon their heads.

Now, neither tears, nor sackcloth, nor ashes, are well-pleasing to God, any farther than they are either *expressions* of sorrow, or *means* of creating it, when a sense of our sins requires it, or when it is fit we should be made sensible of our guilt and danger.

In short; both our souls and bodies are God's, and we are to worship him with both; and those that do not do so, do offer the lame and the blind, which God has declared he abhors.

Since, therefore, it is so very criminal to behave ourselves irreverently in the presence of God, and yet a fault that is very common amongst Christians; as I have proposed to you the pattern of the inhabitants of heaven, who worship God in the most humble manner, so I do wish that with them you would consider,

II. The *wisdom*, and *greatness*, and *goodness*, and *majesty* of God, in whose house you are, and before whose presence you appear; and then you will be convinced, that he is worthy of all the duty and reverence that his creatures are capable of paying him; for he created all things, and for his pleasure they were created.

And, in truth, it is for want of consideration, that men appear before God with the same indifference and want of fear, as they would do before an idol, which neither sees, nor can be angry at, the indevotion and ill behaviour of its worshippers.

Now, Christians would not do so, if they would but open their eyes, and see the wisdom and power of God in the works of the creation. "The heavens declare the glory of God, (saith the Psalmist) and the firmament sheweth his handy-work. There is neither speech nor language where their voice is not heard." Or, as this is finely paraphrased by an English poet:—

All people do their language understand;  
Nor was there ever savage nation known,  
Who in them could not read God's hand;  
In their own tongue all read what's written there,  
For Heaven alone's THE UNIVERSAL CHARACTER.

<sup>a</sup> Chap. ii. 17.

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But lest these things should seem to be above the reach of ordinary capacities, let us consider the things that are about us; all which do manifest some of the attributes of God, and excite us to glorify him after a becoming manner.

And, in the first place, one would wonder; that of so many sorts of creatures, not one of them, since the creation, is lost.—This shews the wonderful *providence* of God, who has taken care of the most contemptible creatures; has provided them with convenient food; has taught them where to seek for shelter against all sorts of storms and enemies, how to defend themselves when they are assaulted, and how to leave a race behind them when they die.

Our blessed Lord assures us, that not a sparrow dies without God's knowledge and permission; and would have us learn from that instance of God's providence, to put ourselves under his protection, and not to fear what man can do against us. He puts us in mind of another instance of God's care: "Consider, (saith he) the fowls of the air: they reap not, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feedeth them;" that is, they meet with food convenient for them as certainly as the day cometh. A sufficient reason why man should depend upon God for his daily bread, and be very thankful for it!

In short; every thing we stand in need of, every thing we enjoy, every thing we see, is capable of exciting in us devout affections, if we would but consider them. For example: Have we not great reason to bless God, that for so many ages he has never denied the world his blessings so long as to destroy it for want of necessities? If we should want rain but for one summer, neither man nor beast could live one year longer. If it should rain one whole winter, all things necessary for our support would perish. If we should have a long calm, the very air would be corrupted, and we should be soon destroyed; and if we should have too long a storm, we should want many things from abroad, which are necessary to our well-being. Does not this convince us of the goodness of God; and should not this make us very thankful when we come before him?

And then, do but consider the power of God in that one instance which St. Paul mentions, [1 Cor. xv.] and which every farmer experiences to his comfort—That every grain of corn he sows is, to all appearance, utterly lost; and so would he and his family be too, but that God, by his mighty power, makes the earth to restore it him again, after another manner, and with a seven-fold increase. And so he will re-

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store us to life again, though our bodies are laid in the earth. He has told us he will do it, and this one instance shews us that he can; and that we ought therefore to serve him most faithfully here, that we may be raised to glory at that great day.

And oh! that these considerations might prevail with Christians to humble themselves in the presence of God, as becomes sinners, as becomes petitioners, as becomes creatures in the presence of their Creator, and subjects in the presence of the great King of all the earth,—without whose protection we are exposed to most powerful enemies,—without whose providence we cannot subsist one moment,—and without whose mercy and pardon we are undone for ever.

Now; because we are but too apt to forget all these considerations, our Church puts us daily in mind how we should behave ourselves before *the face* of Almighty God our heavenly Father;—that we should confess our sins with humility and sincerity;—that we should hear his holy word with reverence;—that we should render thanks to God for all the benefits which we have received at his hands, and ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul. She puts us in mind that these duties are to be performed with an humble voice as well as a pure heart;—she directs us to fall upon our knees when we ask God's mercy and favours, and to stand up when we give him thanks, or praise his holy name. She orders the Psalms of David to be read, that we may learn to bless God in the words of his Holy Spirit; and we hear the Holy Scriptures, that we may know the will of God, and how he has been served by his faithful servants ever since the world began.

Well then; you will perhaps say, we do all this as we are directed. What, and pray to God without concern; scarce minding what you say, sitting at your ease, or gazing about as if God did not see you, or as if holy Angels were not present?

For shame:—let us not call this worshipping God; call it *unthoughtfulness*, *profane-*

*ness*, an *evil habit*, or any thing but serving God, for *that* it is not.

To conclude:—All thoughtful Christians will take a more than ordinary care of their behaviour while they are in God's house and in his presence. We are, you see, in the Scripture way of speaking, *before God*. We would seem to know this, by falling upon our knees as soon as we come into a church. Our business at God's house is, to glorify God in the first place, and then to beg such blessings as we cannot want without being very miserable. And then, if we believe, as we have good reason, that the Angels of God are personally present in the house of God, we shall behave ourselves with a little more decency than we usually do in our own houses, lest they, seeing our ill behaviour, our sloth, and indifference, forsake our church, return to heaven, and there report, that of a truth the fear of God is not amongst us. This has been the case of an infinite number of Christian churches, which have been destroyed, or are now in the hands of unbelievers, because Christians did profane them, or became unworthy of them.

It is a melancholy thing to consider, that too many Christians do not think of these things; but fancy that they have done enough when they have been at the house of God, though they have honoured him neither with their bodies nor souls. But all serious people will consider, that they come to church to pray for pardon of their sins, and that it would be a real misfortune to return home *without absolution*; which, therefore, they receive with the humility of an offender receiving his pardon. They feel the want of grace and strength to do what they are convinced they ought to do; which, therefore, they pray for with the concern of people who will not easily be denied. And lastly; they often remember, with what *fear*, and *reverence*, and *humility*, the holy spirits approach the presence of God; and this they resolve and strive to make their pattern.

And God grant we may all do the same, for Jesus Christ's sake.



## S E R M O N XXVIII.

THE GREAT DUTY OF ACKNOWLEDGING AND GLORIFYING GOD  
PUT IN PRACTICE.

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ASSIST me, glorious God, by thy Holy Spirit, so to think and speak of Thee, as that they who hear me may see and acknowledge Thee in thy wonderful and beneficial works of creation and providence; and that we may all fear, and love, and obey, and glorify thy great name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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P S A L M XXIX. 2.

*Give unto the Lord the Glory due unto his Name.\**

**E**VERY body owns it to be a most necessary duty to praise and glorify the God who made us, and who holds our souls in life. But many, too many, are at a loss, through a careless, unthoughtful temper, how to do it as they should do. At the same time, there is no one thing which we can cast our eyes upon, but may afford us an occasion of *admiring*, and *glorifying*, either the *power*, or the *wisdom*, or the *goodness*, or the *providence* of God.

Now, the want of thus observing the works of God, is the great occasion of that scandalous indifference in the religion which the generality of Christians pay to God.—And it cannot be otherwise, *forasmuch as the knowledge of God is the root and the foundation of all true religion*: And the observing his wondrous works, and glorifying him for them, is the only way of preserving an holy fear, and love, and reverence of God, and an high esteem of him in our minds.

It is true, God does not need any honour we can pay him; he is infinitely *great*, and *good*, beyond what we can think or say of him; but it is altogether for our sakes, that he has made it our duty to glorify him; that we may *think*, and *speak*, and *live*, as becomes those who have a due sense and knowledge of God, “in whom they live, and move, and have their being;” and that they may pay him an *holy*, *reasonable*, and *cheerful* service.

And pray take notice, that in this duty of *glorifying God*, for the works of the creation, we hold communion, in some sense, with the whole world of thoughtful people; which is an instance of communion and charity not to be slighted.

I might entertain you with very many surprising instances of God’s wonderful wisdom and goodness in the things he has made; and which, by an amazing providence, he preserves in being; which have been the subject of many learned men, in order to glorify the great Creator: But lest these things should be above the understanding of ordinary capacities, I will set before you, in one short view, the meaning of that *hymn of praise* in our morning service, which begins with these words, “O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise him, and magnify him for ever.”

Now the Church, in this hymn, would have her children instructed to take all occasions offered them to praise, and bless, and magnify their great Creator, for the wonderful provision he has made for the welfare of all his creatures, and especially for the happiness of man both in this life and in the next.

Our duty, therefore, being to glorify God for his works of wonder and mercy; what I now intend is, to shew you the *many occasions you will have of putting this duty in practice*; and especially in the many instances given us in this song of praise, which is, in effect, the same with the 148th Psalm, but here more particularly set forth.

Now, this hymn begins with the most noble part of the creation: “O ye Angels of the Lord,” &c. which every time we repeat, we should give God thanks for that he gives these his Angels charge concerning us poor mortals, as his Holy Spirit assures us he does.

Let us also remember what the same Spirit tells us, that thousands of thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand of these

\* See Psalm iii. 2. xix. 2. cxlv. 5, 10. cl. 6. Jer. v. 24. Acts xiv. 17. Rom. i. 2. Rev. iv. 11.



glorious beings wait upon God continually, to minister unto him, and to receive his commands. With what thoughts of reverence and fear of this glorious Majesty will this thought affect the mind of every serious Christian! And with what comfort will it fill our souls, when we consider, that we shall, *one day*, be as happy as these very Angels, if in this state of trial we behave ourselves as God has commanded us!

And let us not forget that these Angels are in Scripture called *the eyes of God*; and that they are in every place beholding the evil and the good; and especially in the religious assemblies of Christians (as St. Paul intimates.) And indeed, and as sure as I now speak to you, they are here now present with us in this place, and hear the charge I give you, and are witnesses of your behaviour, and of the attention you give to the service, and to the word of God read and preached unto you.

In the next place, we are led to bless God for the *Heavens* he has made; whether they are those where his Majesty, in an especial manner, together with his glorious Angels, resides; or those heavenly bodies, which we see with our eyes, and by which all nations are led to acknowledge the God that made them; and are without excuse, if they do not adore and magnify their great Creator.

Moses, in the account of the creation,\* mentions *the waters that are above the firmament*; and the Psalmist does the same.†—What these are, or their uses, we know not perfectly; and so it is with all God's works; but this we may be assured of, that God made them for his glory, and our benefit; and we ought to praise him for them, as we do for the rest of the creation.

In the next place, we are called upon to bless and praise God for those wonderful powers by which all nature is governed, and by which all his works are preserved, and do answer the end of their creation. Let us also magnify God for those spiritual powers and agents, by which he orders the affairs of this lower world, protecting and rewarding the good, and bringing the wickedness of the wicked upon their own heads; whether they be particular persons, or whole nations. This is called the providence of God, which we have every day occasions and reason to adore, to fear, and magnify: And let us not forget to do it.

In the next place, how can any man, who has his eyes open, forbear to bless and honour God for those two great lights, the *sun* and *moon*, which he has created? Do but consider the multitude of blessings and comforts which we receive from their light and

heat; without which this whole earth, and all the creatures in it, would soon perish. Can any man see, and consider, these glorious bodies, without saying in his heart, how much more glorious must the Maker of them be! How infinitely good and kind must He be, who for us poor creatures has made such wonderful, such astonishing works! And how insensible, how ungrateful, shall we all be, if we do not bless and magnify our God for these his works!

Let any man look upon the *Heavens* in a clear night, and see the innumerable multitude of bright *stars* which adorn the sky, and give us an occasion of glorifying the Maker of such vast bodies of light, which, though by reason of their distance they appear small to us, yet are many times larger than this earth we tread on.

Let us come to things nearer us. *Showers*, and *dews*, are blessings which both man and beast feel the effects and the comfort of; when God, in whose hands are all these blessings, refresheth the earth with the former and the latter rain in their season: And when he denieth us these blessings, it is to punish us for our unthankfulness, and to make us more sensible that all the blessings which we hope for, or enjoy, are to be asked of him, and that he is to be praised for them.

Little do men consider the uses and blessings of *THOSE WINDS*, which clear the air we breathe in, and keep it free from infection. For whenever God thinks fit to punish a sinful people, he needs but command the winds to cease; and sickness, plagues, pestilence, and death, will follow of course.—This, experience has taught the world; inasmuch as, during the last great plague in England, the wind never stirred; and when God gave the word, and the wind arose, the sickness ceased. What reason therefore have men to consider this, and to magnify the wonderful goodness of God for this part of his works, so beneficial to us, and to the rest of the creation!

What a comfortless world should we live in, (if we could live at all) if our good God had not created *fire* and *heat* for our use, comfort, and necessity; and yet we enjoy them every day, without considering who it is that has provided for us so necessary, so useful, a blessing; and who ought therefore to be praised for it.

The *winter* and *summer* return every year at their proper seasons: Would to God our praise and thanksgivings for the same did also return with them! But the commonness of God's blessings and wonders makes us to forget the author of them, and to forget too to praise him for their several uses. We should not do so, if we did but consider what the  
sad

\* Gen. i. 7.

† Psalm cxlviii.



bad effects of a *constant summer* must needs be; what a parching *heat* and *drought*, or what a perpetual *pinching cold*, would certainly produce. But God has ordered these grateful changes for his glory, and for our benefit, and that we might have constant occasions of blessing and praising him for them.

The *dews* and *frosts*; that is, the *hoar frost*, or frozen vapours, the *frost* and *cold*, the *ice* and *snow*, are all necessary in their seasons, to cleanse the air, and to make the earth more fruitful, according to the old observation of the husbandman, that the *snow* manures every poor man's croft, and makes it more fruitful. So that both poor and rich ought to bless God for these instances of his love and care for his poor creatures.

*Nights* and *days*, *light* and *darkness*, observe and keep the rules and laws which God hath appointed them from the first creation.—These glorify their great Creator, by observing the laws he has set them; while men, unthoughtful men, enjoy these blessings without adoring the bounteous goodness of God. They enjoy the rest and quiet of the *night*; too, too many, without giving God thanks for his mercies renewed unto them every morning. They take the advantage of the *light*, and of the *day*, to follow their labours, and too often neglect to bless God for the many *days* he affords them in which to provide necessities for themselves and their families. The darkness of the night should put us all in mind how uncomfortable our lives would be, if God did not afford us the blessing of the light; by which we can *see*, and *admire*, and *enjoy*, the works of the creation.

This leads us to consider *the earth*, and its wonderful provision for all its numerous inhabitants; and to take occasion, from every blessing we meet with, to observe and to adore the *power*, the *wisdom*, and the *goodness* of God, who hath made the earth so full of his riches, and who filleth all things living with plenteousness.

For example:—Let us take occasion, and bless God for the *fruits of the earth*, by which, through his blessing, our lives are sustained. Let us give God thanks for the *grasses* of the field, by which such a number of creatures are fed for the use of man. Let us take notice of the great variety of those creatures, which are made for our use; some for labour, some for food, some for clothing, some for our pleasure. Who does not see, and feel, the surprising goodness of God, in providing so wonderfully for our ease and welfare? At the same time, let us remember, that our right in these creatures is not absolute; we hold them from God, and he can deprive us of them whenever he sees fit, and whenever

we abuse them. And therefore the Spirit of God has given us this rule, *The merciful man is merciful to his beast*: And whoever abuses any of God's creatures, or tortures them, or destroys such as are neither hurtful while they are alive, nor of use when they are killed, will have more to answer for than men usually think of.

We look upon the *mountains* and *hills*, without considering, that without these the earth would be but an uncomfortable habitation; these being made, by a merciful God, to supply the lower parts of the earth with springs and rivers, so *pleasant*, so *comfortable*, so *useful* to man and beast. Let therefore the water we drink and use put us in mind of that most kind God, who furnishes every country, and especially this of our's, with this necessary element.

The *seas* and *floods* are the next blessings which are called upon to bless and magnify their Maker; that is, we that enjoy these blessings are directed, when we see them, to praise God for the great benefits we receive by them. And indeed, if people who are encompassed by the sea, who cannot, unless they are very stupid indeed, but observe the wonderful laws God hath set it, its surprising ebbings and flowings; who see daily its great advantage to mankind, by the trade it enables men to carry on, and whereby every country has its wants supplied: whoever sees this, great will be their crime, and their judgment severe, if they do not admire, and adore, and praise God for this part of his creation; and especially for the vast provision with which the whole world almost is supplied. Both *great* and *small fish*, *whales*, and *all that move in the waters*, do all of them give us an occasion of admiring and praising God.

[And here let me put you in mind, of what I have often hinted to you, that though the blessings of the seas are innumerable, yet God keeps these blessings under his own especial direction, and gives or withholds them, just as he finds men disposed to receive them with gratitude or unthankfulness. And pray remember the words of Christ's disciples; "Master, we have toiled all the night, and taken nothing." And do not many of you, my good friends and neighbours, do not you do the same too often? And what can you imagine may be the reason? Either you do not pray for, and give God thanks for his blessings, or you pray for the blessings of the seas, and take your own unlawful ways to procure such gains as God never will bless, never will prosper.]

The *fowls of the air* are the next order of blessings which we are called upon to praise God for creating for our use and benefit.—



And indeed their number, the variety of their use, and the beauty of some, is so wonderful, that the most ignorant cannot but see the great and good God in their creation. And when we consider what our Saviour has told us, that not the meanest of these creatures but is under the care of God's providence; that a sparrow falleth not without his knowledge; we shall conclude two things especially: *First*, that we, the very meanest of us, are most certainly under his care and protection, and that nothing can befall us without his knowledge and permission. And, *secondly*, that the lives of his creatures are not to be wantonly taken away; but only (as we observed before) when they are hurtful to us when *alive*, or useful to us when *killed*.

When the CHILDREN OF MEN have recounted all these works of the Lord, then are they themselves called upon to bless the Lord, to praise him, and magnify him for ever. All the rest of the creation do glorify God in the way which he has appointed them; that is, they give men and angels an occasion of *admiring*, of *loving*, of *adoring*, and of *praising* the Maker of them.

Wherever we turn our eyes, (if we do but give ourselves leave to consider) we meet with occasions of praising God, either for his works of mercy, or of judgment. This was one great end of our creation, to *consider*, to *understand*, and to *adore* God. And the more we do this, the more we shall be disposed to love and to serve him sincerely.

But if all men in general are obliged to praise him, much more *the Israel of God*; all those to whom he has made himself, and his will, and laws, known; whom he has chosen for his peculiar people. These will be inexcusable, if they do not adore and praise the Lord who has been so good and kind to them.

And among these, *the Priests of the Lord* stand bound to glorify him, by all the obligations of *duty* and *gratitude*; and dreadful will be their punishment if they do not.—For it is their business to make others sensible of the ways and works of God, of his mercies and judgments, his favours and corrections, and his designs in all his dealings with the children of men.

In short; all that call themselves *the servants of the Lord*, and are really so, will take all occasions of glorifying their Lord and Master, and endeavour and rejoice to see others do so also. And by doing so, they will join in spirit with all those *holy souls* of the righteous who are in Paradise, waiting for a blessed resurrection, and who cease not to bless and praise God for his mercies to

them when in this world, and to those whom they have left behind them.

Lastly; all the holy and humble men of heart, all that fear God, that are afraid to offend him; who in imitation of those holy confessors *Ananias*, *Azarias*, and *Misael*, will lay down their lives, rather than provoke Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell; all these will glorify God for giving them grace and courage to do their duty to him, at the hazard of every thing that is dear to them.

We have seen, my Christian brethren, our duty, which is, to observe the wonderful works of the creation, and to praise and magnify God;—to acknowledge his hand in every thing, and upon all occasions: And this, in order to keep in our minds a constant sense of his glorious perfections, and of our whole dependance upon him; and an holy fear, and love, and reverence of God in our hearts.

And indeed it is for want of this, that so many people forget their Maker, and grow *careless*, *profane*, *unthankful*, and *wicked*; because God is seldom or never in their thoughts. They will not take notice of the ways and works of God, and what daily reasons they have to love and adore him. They receive his blessings, and will not acknowledge him; so that he gives them over to a reprobate mind, a mind insensible and void of judgment.

To prevent this very great judgment, let us, before I conclude, consider, how this duty of acknowledging and praising God, and owning our dependance upon him, may be put into practice, in one instance or other, every day, every hour of our lives. And be assured of it, Christians, you can do nothing more pleasing to God, nor more beneficial to yourselves.

God has given most of us understanding souls. To make us value this mighty blessing, he now and then sends among us a *poor idiot*. Instead of making a jest of such an object of compassion, let us bless God who has been so good to us, as to give us reason; and let us beg of him to give us grace never to abuse it.

He has given you an *healthful body*. You see many others labouring under infirmities. Be not unthankful to God for so great a favour. And if the same good God thinks it best for you, and for his glory, to visit you with sickness, you will still have reason to be thankful, if that sickness of the body shall, through his grace, be a means of healing the diseases of your soul.

You have a convenient place to sleep in, and you have the comfort of sleep. Consider  
how



how many want one or both these blessings, and you can hardly forget to give God thanks every morning of your life.

You have health and strength to labour, and to get an honest livelihood for yourself and family. Think often of this, and you will be thankful to God, who, for good reasons known to himself, has denied many others this blessing.

Every meal you sit down to should put you in mind of your dependance upon God for life, and food, and power to take it.—And they that eat without praising God, and begging his blessing upon his gifts, act too like beasts, and are in danger of perishing with them.

When God gives us seasonable wealth, favourable seed times, the former and the latter rains in their season, and plentiful harvests,—how are we bound to thank him for these general blessings to ourselves and others! And when he denies us these blessings, which he never does but for our good, we are bound, even then, to be thankful.

You are in want of the necessities of life, and are indebted to others for help and assistance. What is your duty? Why, to bless God for your condition, which is the very best for you, (because he has appointed it) and to thank God that he has enabled others to help you, and for that he has given them grace, and an heart to do it.

The same gracious God gives another every thing that his soul can desire: for what end, when others want bread? Why, he makes him his steward, he puts these talents into his hands, and he will fully reward him, if he improves them to his Lord's honour, and the benefit of his master's family.

You have escaped some great danger, or sad misfortune: The very first thing you will do—which you ought at least to do, if you have any sense of religion—is, to give God thanks for your deliverance.

You have been sick, and God has been gracious to you, and hearkened to your prayers, and the prayers of others for your recovery. Will you expect that your prayers will be heard hereafter, if you neglect to praise God for his late mercies?

You have the great comfort of dutiful children. Will not you thank God, every day of your life, for so great a blessing? You will surely do so, when you look into the world, and see how many parents are made miserable by the unhappy and bad lives of their children.

In short; it will be impossible to recount all the occasions a good Christian will have, and take, to praise God for his mercies; for all the known, and for all the unobserved favours, deliverances, visitations, chastisements, and graces; of his Holy Spirit, vouchsafed unto himself, his friends, and family.

But above all things, let no man, who calls himself a Christian, forget or neglect to praise God “for his inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory.” All our happiness in this life, and in the life to come, depends upon this invaluable blessing, and on our being truly sensible of, and thankful for it.

To conclude:—The practice of this great duty of praising God for his works, and for his mercies, will preserve in our souls a constant and lively sense of his glorious perfections; which will be a means of making us truly religious, and will make all other religious duties easy and pleasant to us. His almighty power will make us dread offending him; the sense of our dependance upon him, and his continual care of us, will incline us to love him with all our heart and soul; and the grateful remembrance of his past mercies will make us put our whole trust in him for the time to come.

May God give us all grace to consider these things; that we may with heart and voice join with the heavenly company mentioned in the Revelations, saying, “Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honour, and power, and glory; for Thou hast created all things, and for thy glory they are and were created.”

To Him therefore be ascribed all honour and glory, by us and all his faithful servants, for ever and ever. *Amen.*



## S E R M O N XXIX.

## THE GREAT DANGER OF DELAYING OUR REPENTANCE.

JOHN ix. 4.

*The Night cometh when no Man can work.\**

**I**F this gracious intimation of our Lord were well considered, it would prevent *two very great evils*. It would awaken Christians who are too apt to live without thought, and without concern, as if they had no *work*, no *business*, upon their hands; and it would hinder those who know that they *have* something to do, from putting it off till it is too late to finish it.

Our Saviour's words in the text suppose that every man has a *work of importance* upon his hands; and they serve to warn us of the danger of leaving our work undone till it is impossible to finish it. "The night cometh when no man can work;" that is, death is near at hand, as sure as the night follows the day; and therefore, "whatever our hand findeth to do, we ought to do it with all our might;" the consequence of a surprize being most dreadful.

To prevent this, let us consider, *in the first place*, that we have all a work of importance upon our hands.

*Secondly*, that we are hastening on towards death, as the day does towards night; and as *THAT* approaches, we have still less time to finish our work.

And *thirdly*, that our eternal happiness or misery depends upon our doing the work in the day appointed us to do it in.

I. Let us consider seriously, *that every Christian has a work of importance upon his hands*.

It is for this reason the Apostle exhorts Christians "to work out their salvation with fear and trembling;" that is, with a concern suitable to the *work* they have to do; of which *work* take *THIS SHORT ACCOUNT*.

We are all sinners, and must all make our peace with God, as we hope for mercy.—We have renounced the world, and yet we are apt to love it too well, so that we must labour hard to wean our affections from it. We are perpetually in danger of offending God, and we must be upon our watch continually, or we shall certainly do so. We

have all, more or less, contracted evil habits, and it will take *time*, and *care*, and *pains*, to get rid of them. We stand in need of the grace of God every moment of our lives, and are every day of our lives obliged to pray for the aids of his Spirit to help our infirmities. We receive favours continually, and are continually bound to thank God for them.

Here is work enough for any Christian; and he that fancies he has nothing to do, or thinks Christianity to be a state of ease or idleness, does not yet know what it is to be a Christian. But even *this* is not all.

We have all of us very many enemies to struggle with: The *Devil*, a very powerful spirit, "walketh about continually, seeking whom he may devour," finding them careless and unprepared to resist him. The *world*, a very corrupt world, is always tempting us to follow its ways, which lead to destruction. And lastly, *our own hearts*, if we had no other adversary, would ruin us, without a constant watchfulness. So that a man needs not be at pains to be undone: we shall be undone of course, if we do not labour, and strive, and make resistance.

But then, besides these general duties, which belong to all Christians, every Christian has his proper work, for the faithful discharge of which he must one day answer.

*Parents*, for instance, stand charged with the care of their children, to provide for them, and to bring them up in the fear of God.

*Masters* are accountable for their servants' welfare, and that they live as become Christians. *Servants* are bound to be obedient and faithful, and it will require care and pains to be so.

*Magistrates* stand obliged, and must be at pains, to govern and to do justice;—and *Subjects* must be careful to obey for conscience sake.

The *Rich* will find enough to do to watch against pride, covetousness, and many other

\* See John xii. 35. Jer. xiii. 16. Eccles. ix. 10.



hurtful lusts, "which drown men in destruction and perdition."

And the *Poor*, as they have their proper duties, so they have their peculiar difficulties to struggle with,—to be content with their condition, without attempting to better it by unjust ways.

In a word; all Christians are accountable for their *time*, for the *talents* they have received, and for the *duties* of that state of life in which the providence of God has placed them. And such as live as if they had nothing to do, will one day wish that they had never been born.

But of all employments, that of a *Pastor* is the most *difficult*, the most *hazardous*, and the most *laborious*, to discharge it faithfully. To conduct Christians to eternal happiness, through a corrupt world, infinite errors, and most powerful enemies;—to teach the way of salvation, without prostituting the Word of God to vile purposes;—to convert sinners to God by their example as well as by their sermons;—to instruct the ignorant;—to reprove the disorderly;—to awaken the consciences of the careless;—to silence gainfayers;—to comfort and restore dejected penitents;—to visit the sick, and to answer all the ends of that great work;—to *pray* constantly for a blessing upon our labours, and upon our people, without which all our labour would be in vain. These are but *part* of that great work with which Pastors stand charged.

And when we seriously advise Christians to remember the work they have to do, and the account they must give, we acknowledge, at the same time, that we ourselves stand charged with a greater burthen than *they* do, and that it behoves *us*, above all Christians, to remember, "That the night cometh when no man can work," since we have so great a work to answer for.

And now you see, good Christians, that we have all of us a *work of importance* upon our hands; a *work* which must, at our peril, be done while the day lasts. To make us all, therefore, more concerned to do the work in its season which God has appointed us, we ought,

II. In the second place, to consider, *That we are all hastening on towards death, as the day does towards the night; and that, as THAT approaches, we have still less time to finish the work we have to do.*

The truth is, the sentence of death is already passed upon every one of us. And God only knows when that sentence is to be put in execution; till then, *he* has allowed us time to prepare for an *everlasting state* that must follow; a state of *endless misery*, if

we shall have spent our time ill; and a state of *unspeakable happiness*, if we shall have done the work in its season which God hath appointed us.

We should do well therefore to consider, that the time of our life, which is already past, and was not employed in doing our duty, is for ever lost to us; which must needs be an astonishing thought to all such as have spent the greatest part of their life in sin and vanity, without considering why God sent them into the world, or what will be expected from them when they come to account for the time they have lived. He that has spent his youth in folly and doing nothing, has no more youth to spend in virtue; and he that has never thought of the concerns of his soul, till a few days before he comes to die, has but a few days in which to provide for eternity. Now, *this* is a consideration which should make Christians very serious indeed.

If a man in his worldly affairs has made an ill bargain, *time*, and *advice*, and *future care*, may set all strait again, and the loss may be made up. If a man has spent a good estate, he has this comfort however, that he shall not always live to be reproached for his bad husbandry. But what amends can be made, what arguments can be made use of, to comfort a person who has lived an unthoughtful, useless, sinful life, and is just going to give an account of his talents, and the use he has made of them?

Christians would do well to lay these things to heart, and not to trust the endless welfare of their souls to such uncertainties as are the number of our days, which God only knows, and who may be provoked to shorten them when men make so ill use of them.

In short; we are no sooner out of the hands of our Maker, but we are upon our way to the grave; we do, as St. Paul speaks, "We die daily." Some part of our *time*, some of our *friends*, some of our *comforts*, are every day going, till at last we follow them ourselves. I must not say, *and then there's an end of us*; so far from that, that *then* begins our *happiness* or *misery*;—for,

III. *Our eternal happiness or misery will depend upon our having spent this life well or ill; this being the sentence of life and death: "They that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire."*

A consideration so serious and affecting, to such as lay any thing to heart, that one should need say no more on this head, if the corrupt heart of man, as we find by sad experience, did not render this very con-



deration of little use, by inventing ways to delude themselves, without scripture, and without reason.

I shall not now insist upon the delusion of those who take no care how they spend their time, depending upon the prayers of those they leave behind them, as if God had given them any warrant in his word to do so; or as if those they leave behind them would be more concerned for their souls than they themselves were, when they were alive.—Neither shall I do any more than take notice of the delusion of such as depend upon the *goodness* of God, without considering, that God is *just* as well as *good*; and having expressly declared, that “he will judge men according to the works done in the body,” “whether they have been good or evil;” he will most certainly do so, though foolish men should fancy that he will not be severe with them, notwithstanding their provocations. He has shewed the world that he can be severe, when sinners go on to provoke him, by destroying not only particular persons, but families, cities, countries, and the whole world, for their wickedness.

But that which I would more particularly insist upon is, *the delusion of depending upon a DEATH-BED REPENTANCE*; when men defer that, which should be the work of their whole life, to the very last moments of it, *to the evening, when no man can work*. A delusion so common, that one cannot be too earnest with Christians to beware of it, lest it happen to them as it did unto Esau,<sup>b</sup> “who found no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

Christians, therefore, should be very often put in mind, that the terms of salvation are already fixed, which are, “That without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” That when men “repent, they should turn to God, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” A very dreadful consideration to such as have put off their amendment till it is too late to be done! To which if we add such considerations as *these*:—That the condition of such as defer their repentance grows every day more and more desperate. That the judgment of the unfruitful tree, “cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?” may be passed upon a sinner, when he least thinks of it. That the merciful invitation, “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found,”<sup>c</sup> supposes, that there is a time when he will not be found of them that seek him; that “he who being often reprov’d, yet hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy.” That the state of sinners may be so provoking, that though Noah, Daniel, and Job, should intercede for

them, yet God will not hearken to their prayers.

Whoever considers these things, and that God has made our time short, and our death uncertain, on purpose that we may begin betimes to consider of our latter end, and be always prepared for our Lord’s coming; that death is ever at hand, and the consequence of a surprize most dreadful. A Christian cannot think of these things with any degree of seriousness, but he must see a necessity either of being prepared for death whenever God shall call him, or of being undone for ever—which cannot be thought on without astonishment.

Well then; what a wise man when he comes to die would wish that he had done, *that he ought to do forthwith*, “since in the midst of life we are in death;” since the day wears away apace, and since eternity depends upon our making use of our time.

I will therefore tell you, what every man in his senses will wish he had done when the night comes; that is, when he comes to die; he will wish, for instance—*First*, that he had made a just and Christian settlement of his temporal concerns, that he might not be distracted with the cares of this world, when all his thoughts and hopes should be upon another. *2dly*; That he had made his peace with God by a timely repentance. *3dly*; That he had faithfully done his duty in the state of life in which the providence of God had placed him. *4thly*; That he had, in some good measure, weaned his affections from things temporal, and had loosened the ties which fasten us to the world. *5thly*; He will wish, moreover, That by acts of mercy and charity he had entitled himself to the mercy of God, which, at the hour of death, and at the day of judgment, he will stand in need of. *6thly*; That he had got such habits of patience and resignation during his health, that might render death less frightful. *7thly*, and lastly; He will wish, that by a constant practice of devotion, preparatory for death, he had learned what to pray for, what to hope for, and what to depend upon, in his last sickness.

This is what every man will wish that he had done, when he comes to die; that *when the night cometh*, he may have *no more work to do*, than to resign his soul into the hands of God, in hopes of a blessed resurrection.

I will just shew you the *reasonableness*, and the *necessity*, of having all *these works* done before the night comes, when no man can do them as he *ought* to do.

And first, for what concerns the *settlement of a man’s temporal affairs*. If we consider the duties of one who is going to make his *last*

<sup>b</sup> Heb. xii. 17.

<sup>c</sup> Isaiah lv. 6.



*last will*; that he is to take care for the *payment of all his just debts*; that he is to make *restitution*, if he has wronged any body; that his charities ought to be useful, and as large in proportion as the favours he has received; that he is to do no *wrong*, shew no *resentment*, leave *nothing undone* which may as much as possible prevent *misunderstandings*, *quarrels*, and *lawsuits*, amongst executors. Whoever, I say, would faithfully discharge all these engagements, must not fancy that these things are to be done in a hurry, when the *night is come*, and a man wants time to consider, friends to advise, and power to recollect, his distracted thoughts.

And if so much time is necessary to settle a man's *temporal* concerns; much more is necessary to settle his *spiritual*,—*to make his peace with God by a sincere repentance*; which every man when he comes to die will wish with all his soul he had done while he was in his health, and could redeem his mispent time, and bring forth fruit meet for repentance,—*which is the only sure sign of a true conversion*.

In short; a Christian's whole life ought to be a state of repentance. He ought to see and bewail the *corruption of his nature*, which makes him backward to please God, ready to offend him, fond of the pleasures of this life, and unthoughtful of that which is to come. He ought to call himself to an account daily, and see whether he gets the mastery of his corruptions, and whether he does not often fall into the sins he has repented of. He ought to have some good assurance that he grows in grace, and that he is in some good measure restored to the image of God, in which he was at first created. This, I say again, ought to be the work of a man's whole life; and he that leaves it to the last moments of his life, must not expect the comforts of an happy death.

All Christians are most highly concerned to lay these things to heart. They should imitate the wise builder, who sat down and counted the cost, whether he was able, and whether he was resolved, to go through the work. So should every man seriously consider what it is he undertakes, when he promises to be a Christian; namely, that he will no longer be the Devil's subject and servant;—that he will no longer follow his own corrupt inclinations, but be governed by the law of God, and do that which he believes will best please God. That he will

receive the Gospel as the law of God, without doubting its truth, or disputing the reasonableness of its injunctions. That he will obey the laws of God, as the only way of pleasing God, and of qualifying himself for heaven and happiness. Besides this, he is to consider the difficulties he is certain to struggle with; namely, a corrupt world, a corrupt heart, infinite errors, and powerful enemies, which yet he is not to submit to; forasmuch as the Almighty God has promised to defend and assist him.

In short; if Christians could be prevailed on to consider betimes, that this life is but a short passage to another, which is to last for ever;—that it is a state of trial;—that our eternal happiness or misery depends upon our good or bad behaviour while we live here;—that God requires obedience to his laws, *only* that we may not be miserable;—that he requires nothing of us but what he will enable us to go through, even with pleasure, if we submit ourselves entirely to be governed by his Spirit, and by his laws. If Christians would consider this, and that *the night of death cometh, when no man can work*; it is probable they would think of what they have to do with a little more seriousness than is to be met with, and *consider things as they have regard to eternity*, without which we shall, *before we perceive it*, set our hearts upon the world, forget the only business for which we were sent into it; and, when we come to die, have no sign of virtue to shew; and, when it is too late, repent that we have been *unprofitable servants*.

To conclude:—The sentence passed upon Adam, and in him upon all his posterity, after his fall, was *this*: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread.” Labour, therefore, is a duty, from which no man is exempt, without forfeiting his right to his daily bread; we are obliged to it *by this sentence*, as we are the children of Adam. As we are Christians, we are obliged to it, in conformity to Jesus Christ, whose whole life was all labour and sufferings. And lastly, as sinners, we are bound to it, because, without labour and pains, we can never be reconciled to God.

It behoves us all, therefore, to take care that this great business of our life be not put off till it is too late to finish it, lest death overtake us unawares, and we be obliged to bewail our unthoughtfulness in a miserable eternity.



## S E R M O N XXX.

THE CONDITION OF OBTAINING THAT PEACE OF GOD WHICH PASSETH ALL UNDERSTANDING.

P S A L M XXIX. 10.

*The Lord shall give his People the Blessing of Peace.\**

**I**F you expect that, from these words, I shall speak of the blessings of a peace which we have talked of so much of late, and wished for; though *that* is the occasion, it is not to be the subject of the discourse I am now going to make to you.

The truth is, considering that the world was engaging all our thoughts and passions in favour of an expected peace, and the consequences of it, I thought it would be a very proper time to put people in mind of a peace of another kind, which the world can neither give nor take away; and which it concerns us, above all things, to think of.

It is true, even a worldly peace is a very desirable blessing; but then, it is so little in our power to hinder or promote it, that we are not accountable whether it goes forward or not. Besides, such a peace (though made with wisdom and foresight) is at best uncertain; neither does our happiness depend upon it.

But the peace which I would propose to your meditations is of another nature: it is what is certainly attainable; our happiness depends upon it; it is our business to look after it; and we shall be accountable, we shall be the sufferers, if we do not obtain it. It is that peace which we pray for daily, which the world cannot give, which the world cannot deprive us of, and which, if we once obtain it, will effectually convince us, that the government of the world, and consequently all the changes of this mortal life, are in the hands of God, who will always do what is best for such as fear him.

In short; this is that legacy which the Son of God left at his death to all his faithful servants, in these words,<sup>1</sup> "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you." Of which peace the words of the text are a prophecy, "The Lord shall give his people" [the true Israelites] "the blessing of peace."

It is certain, it is God who maketh wars to cease in all the world. This he does to all, as

he maketh his sun to shine on the evil, and on the good; but it is to his people only that he gives that peace, which is a blessing indeed, and which passeth all understanding. As for all others, the way of peace they know not.

And now, if what has been said has raised in you a desire of knowing more particularly, what this peace is;—how we may obtain, how we may secure, so great a blessing;—and what will be the fruits and effects of it;—I shall, by the good blessing of God, endeavour to give you satisfaction in each of these particulars.

I. And first; what is the peace here spoken of? I know not whether one can give a better answer to this question, than in the words of our church, in one of her hymns, in the office of Ordination, where she describes and prays for this blessing in these words:—"Put back our enemies far from us, and help us to obtain peace in our hearts with God and man,"—the best, the truest gain.

To be a little more particular. It is that peace which arises in our souls, by believing and sincerely embracing these truths:—That Jesus Christ, our peace-maker,<sup>m</sup> hath reconciled us to God by the blood of his cross;—that if, even after this reconciliation, any man sin, (as we are apt to do) our condition is not desperate; for we have an Advocate with the Father, for whose sake God will graciously receive and pardon all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him;—and because of ourselves we are not able to please God, that he has promised his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, by whom the eyes of our understandings shall be enlightened, our infirmities helped, our souls strengthened, until we are rooted and grounded in the love of God.

This is the foundation of that peace we are speaking of, which consists in an humble assurance, (built upon God's promise) that he is no longer our enemy;—that we are under his guidance and protection;—that

\* See Luke i. 79.

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 27.<sup>m</sup> Col. i. 20.



we are safe while we continue so; and that we shall always continue so, if it is not our own fault.

We easily perceive, that this is a blessed state of life; and we shall see it yet plainer, when we have considered the condition of those, who, instead of enjoying this *happy peace*, are at *war* with God and their own consciences; as all indeed are who live in any known sin.

To defy the Almighty,—to despise what he can do to us,—are words of too much horror and madness to be spoke out: But let it be considered, whether men do not what they dare not speak, while they live in *rebellion*, in an open defiance of his laws? The Holy Scriptures call *this* “a state of war;”<sup>a</sup> in which we are not only *led captive*, but like slaves “sold under sin:” which expressions are made use of, to represent unto our minds the miseries of such a condition, where (if our consciences are awake) we are in continual fear of being undone.

And verily, it were better for us, that our houses were burnt over our heads, our goods plundered, and ourselves prisoners, and at the will of our enemies, than that we should be at war with God, and our own consciences. So saith our Saviour expressly, Luke xii. 4: “Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him which, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.”

But if this be so unhappy a condition, how comes it to pass, that so many are so easy under it? One would rather expect, that one-half of the world should be distracted with the fears of what shall become of them. Why truly so they would, if they did but see the danger they are in: but there are ways of preventing this.

Some there are, whose consciences are *hardened*, or (as the Apostle expresses it, 1 Tim. iv. 2.) “feared with a hot iron.” It cannot be expected that *these* should feel any uneasiness. There are *others*, who make their minds easy, by purposing some time or other to lead a new life, and so to die in the favour of God. Many fear no danger, because they perform the outward acts of Christian worship as well as others. Lastly, the greatest part of men seek for ease, and in some measure find it, in the great variety of business, in the great variety of pleasures, in worldly cares, and worldly company: And the very reason why people chuse any of these methods of ease, before a more perfect acquaintance with themselves, is *the sad apprehension of knowing God to be their enemy*,

<sup>a</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 11.

<sup>b</sup> Rom. vii. 14.

and an *unwillingness to do what is necessary to gain his friendship*.

It is not our business, at present, to shew the extreme folly of laying conscience asleep, by these or any other ways; but *this* is fit to be taken notice of, that there is a vast difference betwixt *peace of conscience*, and *fearing no danger*.

A man may be asleep on the top of a mast, (as Solomon observes<sup>c</sup>) and fear no danger; but it cannot be said, that he is in safety. One may *stifle, divert, bribe*, and *fear* the conscience;—one may wink hard, and stop his ears, so that he shall neither *hear*, nor *see* the mischief that is ready to befall him;—and yet the danger is as near him as if he saw it. But *peace of conscience*, arising from the knowledge of God's goodness, and our *sincere endeavours* of doing what we know will please him, is both *safe* and *grateful*; and while we enjoy the blessing of *this* calm, we need not fear a storm will follow.

II. *How we may obtain this blessed peace*, we come now to consider. But first let us consider, that the conditions of *this peace* cannot possibly be *hard* or *unreasonable*.

As God has a *right* to give us laws, so all his laws do proceed from his *goodness* and *kindness* for his creatures: “For never, (saith the Wise Man<sup>d</sup>) “would God have made any thing, if he had hated it.” Here then let us fix our firm belief, *That the love of God for us was the foundation of all that he has commanded us to believe or do, in order to our happiness*.

He only knows, what can make us happy,—what we can do ourselves,—what help we shall want,—what enemies we shall meet with,—what dispositions are necessary to fit us for that happiness he has designed for us: And all his commands (*which are the conditions of our peace*) are all given for these very ends; and not to be a burthen to us.

After all, we must not imagine, that this great blessing is to be obtained without trouble. To get out of the snare of the Devil; to break off evil habits; to accustom one's self to virtuous actions; to make the service of God one's delight; this will require *pains*, and *patience*, and *prayers*, and *searchings of heart*, before it is brought about: And sure it is worth all this, to be possessed of *that peace*, which ariseth from an assurance of *being beloved of God*.

To come to the conditions of this peace we are speaking of;—*how it is to be obtained*.

Now; all our *fears* arising from a sense of our having offended God, our peace can no otherwise be made, than by *obtaining his pardon, receiving the terms of grace* which he

<sup>c</sup> Prov. xxiii. 34.

<sup>d</sup> Wisd. xi. 24.



propose, and resolving to be more fearful of offending him for the time to come; or, in other words, the conditions of our peace are, *Repentance, faith, and obedience.* By *repentance*, we are reconciled to God; by *faith*, we understand what will please God, and are encouraged to undertake it; by *obedience*, we gain such dispositions as fit us for heaven.

He that would find *rest unto his soul* has *this*, and *this* way only, of obtaining it:—He may lay his conscience *asleep*; he may please himself with ways of his own devising; he may flatter himself that God will be merciful to him, though he should not observe these methods of peace; but *safe* it is impossible for any man to be, except in the way of *God's* appointment.

Let us now see what the Scriptures say upon these conditions of peace.

And first, *of repentance.* St. Paul assures us, that *this* is the *foundation* of our peace with God; and upon which he will *acknowledge us*: “Let every one that nameth the “name of Christ,” (and pretends to be his servant) “depart from iniquity.” How depart from iniquity? Why, not only confess our sins, (which we are ready enough to do, and lament our weaknesses) but sincerely resolve, for the time to come, to forsake every evil way, to avoid all sin, and the occasions of it.

But we are beset with temptations, and in many things we offend all. Must not we, therefore, hope for pardon and peace, when at any time we have been overtaken in a fault? Yes, sure;—but on this condition only, that when I repent of any fault, I do at the same time sincerely resolve, not to repeat *that fault* in particular, and to the best of my power to do as I have resolved, praying for grace as well as pardon: otherwise, he that does not keep a stricter watch over such sins as do most easily beset him, must not too confidently hope for pardon: Which obliges me to take notice of a mistake which people are too apt to run into.

We are apt to conclude, that if in the main our lives be tolerable, for a slip now and then there is no great hurt in it. But pray let us consider, that such slips as these, *if wilful*, are a plain disowning of God's authority, and as plain a forfeiture of his favour, and the peace which attends it.

All at present that I shall say to this mistake is this:—See what are those sins which the Scriptures say *will keep men out of Heaven.* If *your sin*, which you now and then indulge, is one of those, (as to be sure it is) why then depend upon it, it will shut you out of heaven; and then it is all one how many

other good qualifications you had; they will be of no use to you.

In short; he that calleth sinners to repentance, calleth them from *all their sins.* And it is the greatest instance of presumption, to hope that God will pass by any wilful sins, because we *serve* him in other things; as if our service profited *him* more than *ourselves.*

But to proceed:—To the promise of God, “that he will accept of our repentance, instead of a sinless obedience,” there is this condition added, “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will forgive you your trespasses. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.”

Now, this is so far from being a burthen-some condition, that it is certainly one of the most comfortable clauses that could have been added to the article of repentance. For, if I sincerely forgive others, I may plead with God for a pardon for my own sins which I have repented of, and very securely depend upon his word and promise. Thus you see how *necessary*, and how *reasonable* it is, that we should *repent*, as we hope for the favour of God.

The next condition of our peace is *faith*, by which we receive the conditions of our salvation offered us by Jesus Christ; *believing* him to be sent from God for that very end; confidently relying upon all that he hath revealed to us, without questioning his authority, or disputing his commands.

Now; whoever has this faith will soon find himself obliged to do what God has commanded, in order to his peace and happiness. For instance:—If he really *believes* that God has in his Holy Word set down the terms of salvation, he will not hope for salvation on any other terms. If he *believes* that *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*, he will think himself certainly obliged to *purify himself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit.* If he *believes* that God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him, as he will find reason, so he will not fail to *pray* for, the comfort and assistance of that blessed guide. If he *believes* a judgment to come, he will take care to examine and to judge himself, that he may not be condemned of the Lord when he cometh to judge the world in righteousness. Lastly, if he *believes* the everlasting rewards and punishments of the life to come, he cannot be indifferent which of these may be *his own portion.*

From all which it appears, that *faith*, as it is a condition of our peace, is a real principle of obedience; not only discovering to us where we are to look for happiness, but also



engaging us to *do* what we believe we ought to do in order to attain it.

And this brings us to consider the last condition of our peace with God, a *sincere obedience*. "He that doeth the will of my Father," saith Jesus Christ, (and *he only*) "shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." And what the will of God is, the Apostle tells us, "This is the will of God," the great design of the Gospel, "even your sanctification;" that is, that we be renewed in our nature, freed from the tyranny of sin, and so far in the way of perfection, as to be always making some progress towards it.

And why is *this* so necessary an *article of our peace*? Why; because this is the *wedding garment*, without which no man shall ever be admitted into heaven. For, *without holiness no man shall see the Lord*,—SEE THE GOODNESS OF GOD.

He does indeed positively require our obedience to certain laws he hath given us, but then this is to the end "that, by obeying the truth, we may purify our souls," and qualify ourselves for heaven, where no impure thing can enter.

But how shall we know the laws he has given us for this purpose? Would to God that were the only thing that is wanting to make our obedience perfect! He hat endeavours to live up to that measure of knowledge he has already, and is ready to do the will of God at all times when he knows it, "he shall (as our Saviour saith) know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

Thus I have laid before you the *nature* and the *conditions* of a peace better than any the world can give; the effect of a conquest greater than those the world so much magnifies. It is Solomon's assertion, not mine, "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city."

What hinders us then from obtaining this peace? Do we think it will be time enough hereafter? *When*, pray? When we come to die? Perhaps that may be too late.—To be plain, God has fixed the time: "To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." And he who will not take *this time*, may, too likely, never embrace another.

But perhaps I am persuading you to seek for *that peace* which most men think they are possessed of. We may easily know that, by considering seriously whether we observe the conditions before-mentioned.

A sign of true *repentance* (for instance) is amendment of life: A sign of true *faith* is,

our living as if the things we profess to believe were true: A sign of true *obedience* is, having respect unto all God's commandments.

Verily, if we have not this testimony of our peace with God, we have no manner of reason to be easy with our condition: It is a false peace we are possessed of, which will stand us in no stead at the hour of death, (when we shall have most need of it) nor in the day of judgment. He that shall not have made his peace with God before he go hence, (and how soon that may be, God only knows) he will have God for his enemy, and for his portion eternal misery.

But God forbid that we should let so great a concern continue in so great uncertainty. Is the peace of God of so little value? Is the peace of conscience, grounded upon God's word, not worth our striving for? Is the love of God, which is better than life itself, a favour fit to be despised? And yet do not we plainly despise him and his offers of mercy, when we despise the means laid down for our salvation?

The Gospel is, with great reason, stiled *the Gospel of Peace*; because the terms of *peace* and *salvation* are contained in it. And yet, it seems, these terms may be hid or cannot be perceived by some. But who are they? Why, only such as are lost,—lost to all concern for themselves, all gratitude to God, and all sense of virtue. As to all others, who have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, *they* see the *reasonableness*, the *exceeding mercy*, of the terms of reconciliation proposed in the Gospel: they find by experience, that "the work of righteousness, (as the Prophet speaks, *Is. xxxii. 17.*) is peace; and that the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."

Having therefore made their peace with God by a *sincere repentance*; having received the Gospel with a full resolution to be governed by its laws; and lastly, being intent to subdue their wills and affections to the will of God; having these testimonies of their *repentance, faith, and obedience*, they find themselves upon *good grounds* easy; being hereby freed from the tyranny of their corruptions, from the prevailing power of the Devil, from the terrors of an evil conscience, from the wrath of an angry God, and from the fears of what may come hereafter.

These motives, *to well-disposed minds*, will be sufficient to oblige them to set about the work of their conversion, with fear, and a concern worthy of so great an interest. I shall therefore conclude this discourse, after I have made a few *useful observations* from what has been said.

And first; as this *blessing of peace* is the gift of God, so the conditions on which we may hope

<sup>1</sup> Matth. vii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 3.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. i. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Prov. xvi. 32.



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Verily, if we have not this testimony of our peace with God, we have no manner of reason to be easy with our condition: It is a false peace we are possessed of, which will stand us in no stead at the hour of death, (when we shall have most need of it) nor in the day of judgment. He that shall not have made his peace with God before he go hence, (and how soon that may be, God only knows) he will have God for his enemy, and for his portion eternal misery.

But God forbid that we should let so great a concern continue in so great uncertainty. Is the peace of God of so little value? Is the peace of conscience, grounded upon God's word, not worth our striving for? Is the love of God, which is better than life itself, a favour fit to be despised? And yet do not we plainly despise him and his offers of mercy, when we despise the means laid down for our salvation?

The Gospel is, with great reason, stiled *the Gospel of Peace*; because the terms of *peace* and *salvation* are contained in it. And yet, it seems, these terms may be hid or cannot be perceived by some. But who are they? Why, only such as are lost,—lost to all concern for themselves, all gratitude to God, and all sense of virtue. As to all others, who have the eyes of their understanding enlightened, *they* see the *reasonableness*, the *exceeding mercy*, of the terms of reconciliation proposed in the Gospel: they find by experience, that "the work of righteousness, (as the Prophet speaks, *Is. xxxii. 17.*) is peace; and that the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever."

Having therefore made their peace with God by a *sincere repentance*; having received the Gospel with a full resolution to be governed by its laws; and lastly, being intent to subdue their wills and affections to the will of God; having these testimonies of their *repentance, faith, and obedience*, they find themselves upon *good grounds* easy; being hereby freed from the tyranny of their corruptions, from the prevailing power of the Devil, from the terrors of an evil conscience, from the wrath of an angry God, and from the fears of what may come hereafter.

These motives, to *well-disposed minds*, will be sufficient to oblige them to set about the work of their conversion, with fear, and a concern worthy of so great an interest. I shall therefore conclude this discourse, after I have made a few *useful observations* from what has been said.

And first; as this *blessing of peace is the gift of God*, so the conditions on which we may hope

<sup>1</sup> Matth. vii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Pet. i. 21.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Prov. xvi. 32.



hope to attain it are set down in his word. And if an Angel from heaven should tell me that I might obtain *pardon* and *peace* upon any other terms than *repentance* and *holiness of life*, I should have reason to suspect his message. How miserably disappointed then are they like to be, who *continue in sin*, depending upon *God's mercy*,—upon the prayers of the faithful,—or upon any other method which God has no where declared he will accept of!

Secondly; If obedience to the laws of God be necessary to obtain such dispositions as shall fit us for heaven; what will be the lot of those who put off *their conversion* to the last moments of their lives? If becoming a *new creature*, (which is absolutely required in the Christian dispensation) if that be necessary, sure it will require time to be formed, as all other creatures do.

Our third observation may be *this*, That such as make their whole lives a course of *sinning* and *repenting*, depending upon God's goodness, should consider, that this is a very odd way of reasoning,—That because God is merciful, I may therefore be *less* careful to *please* him.

Fourthly; That such as dare not look into the *state of their souls*, may depend upon it, they are *not* in the *way of peace*, however easy they may be: because *peace of conscience* ariseth from a *knowledge* and *assurance*, that

God will be *favourable* to me according to his word; because, upon considering my ways, I find that they are ordered in some good measure according to that word.

Lastly; This blessing is attainable by all sorts and conditions of men, who shall set their hearts upon it. For as we may have all worldly blessings, and yet want *this*, which is *better* than *all* besides; so we may want those worldly blessings, and be possessed of this, which will make us sufficient amends. Our *weakness* cannot hinder us when God has promised to hear and help us. Want of *spare time* to seek after it should not discourage us, since God, *the author of peace*, has appointed us our *lot in the world*. And *want of learning* will be no excuse; for God has given us a *conscience* to supply that want in a good measure; and he that attends to *that* will in most instances *know* what will please God.

What have we then all to do, but with an *humble faith* to embrace those truths, *which lie open* to the *meanest capacities*; with a willing obedience to do what we believe will please God; and with an unfeigned sorrow to beg God's pardon whenever we know we have offended him, and strive in earnest to do so no more.

Then the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, will be with us, and remain with us for ever. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N XXXI.

### WORKS, NOT WORDS ONLY, NECESSARY TO SALVATION.

M A T T H E W vii. 21.

*Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven.\**

HOW often do we hear these words of Christ!—That you may attend to what is going to be said to you upon this subject, pray take notice, that the salvation of every soul of us will depend upon our understanding this declaration of our Lord, and upon our ordering our lives accordingly. “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,” that is, who professeth himself a Christian, and observes the outward duties of Christianity, “shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father:” he that leadeth a Christian life, he, and he only, shall be saved.

There is a most sad mistake, which people of all religions and professions do naturally fall into; namely, to satisfy themselves with performing the outward parts of religious worship, without considering, that the strictest observation of such duties will avail us nothing in the sight of God, if we are not by these, and through his grace, brought to lead a *godly, righteous, and sober life*, to his honour and glory.—This was the false hopes of the Jews, and this was their ruin at last, when they would not be persuaded, either by their Prophets, or by Christ, or by his forerunner the Baptist, to mend their lives,

\* See Matth. xii. 23. x. 33. xxiii. 28, 29. Luke vii. 46, 48. viii. 21. 1 Cor. iv. 20. 2 Tim. ii. 19. James i. 22. 1 John i. 6. but



but depended upon their acceptance with God, on account of their strict observance of their outward worship and ceremonies, without a change of heart and manners.

At the same time we must not imagine, but that the publick worship and ordinances of religion are an acceptable way of honouring our Creator and Redeemer; of obtaining the graces and blessings of God; and a powerful *means* of forwarding our salvation. But still they are only *means*, and intended by God to lead and enable us to perform the duties, *the necessary duties*, which we owe to God, our neighbour, and ourselves; namely, to live *soberly, righteously, and godly*, in this present evil world.

Outward ordinances are a powerful means of bringing us to salvation, through the grace of God. For indeed, if we did not observe one day in seven, we should soon forget the God that made us, and the Saviour who redeemed us;—if we did not go to church to hear God's word, we should be ignorant of his will;—if we did not often pray to God for his blessing upon ourselves and our labours, we should forget that we depend upon him for *life, and breath, and all things*; that is, in other words, *we should live without God in the world*; we should be downright Atheists.

But when we join with our fellow Christians in glorifying God for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings we enjoy, or hope for; this will be a powerful means of imprinting on our hearts a grateful reverence for God when we leave his house.

So when we hear his promises of eternal happiness to those that obey him, and the dreadful judgments that must be the portion of those that neither love, nor fear, nor worship God, as they ought to do; these truths often repeated are very proper to comfort and encourage such as are serious and good, and to awaken, and to amend the wicked.

And so for the other outward ordinances of Christianity; they are truly *means of salvation*, when they are observed as they ought to be.

What an invaluable blessing is it, to be received into the church of God *by baptism*; to be made a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven; to be under the government of God's Holy Spirit, and under the care of his Angels.

These are powerful motives to such as have any thoughts and concern for their souls, to live as becomes the children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

The Sacrament of the *Lord's Supper* is another outward and *powerful means* of salvation. We are too apt to forget what was

promised for us when we were made Christians, and too apt, God knows, to fall into the sins we have repented of. Now in this Sacrament Jesus Christ has provided a remedy for both these evils. We are here put in mind, and required, to examine into our lives, whether we live as becomes the Gospel of Christ; and if we have not done so, to repent and amend, as we hope for salvation, with assurance of pardon, through the merits and mediation of Christ, if we do so.

These are *means* of making us religious, and acceptable to God; but then, we must have a care of flattering ourselves, that because we observe these outward ordinances, that therefore we are truly religious and in a happy condition; for a man may have a *form of godliness without the power*. One may be a strict observer of the Lord's day, a careful attender upon the publick worship, without an heart sincerely disposed to lead a Christian life, to be governed by the word we have heard, and the precepts given us in the Gospel. "They hear my words, (saith God, by his Prophet)" "but will not do *them*."

You shall hear what God saith by another Prophet,<sup>b</sup> "Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and come before me in *this house, which is called by my name, and say, we hope for pardon?—Is not this to make the house of God a den of thieves, of drunkards, and all uncleanness?*"

You shall hear what an Apostle of Christ tells us, That in the last days, even an outward profession of Christianity shall be attended with the greatest crimes."<sup>c</sup> "Men," even men professing Christianity, shall be "lovers of themselves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, despisers of those that are good, incontinent, fierce, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

Need we any greater proof that we are *even now* in the last days of Christianity: when we see Christians, so called, guilty of such crimes as these, under an outward form of religion? Not considering, "that they crucify to themselves the Son of God again, and put him to an open shame."<sup>d</sup>

Now, in order to prevent these sad delusions, let every serious Christian, who hopes for salvation, ask himself, Why do I call Jesus Christ my Lord; or, in other words, why do I profess myself to be a Christian? Is it not because, as we are sinners, we are under the displeasure of God, and therefore can have no hopes of salvation, if by the merits of Jesus Christ, and through faith in

<sup>a</sup> Ezek. xxxiii. 31.<sup>c</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 5.<sup>b</sup> Jer. vii. 9.<sup>d</sup> Heb. vi. 5.



his blood, we are not restored to God's favour, and obtain his pardon, and by his Holy Spirit be enabled to lead an holy and a Christian life? If we do not therefore endeavour to lead such a life, we must never hope for the kingdom of heaven, notwithstanding all our outward devotion and professions.

You observe the Lord's Day, and attend the service of the church: This is certainly a Christian duty, and well done; but then, if you are not a better Christian for it all the week after, it is to be feared you went to church out of shame, or out of custom only, and not out of devotion to God, or to obtain such heavenly dispositions as are necessary to your leading a good life.

We come to church *to glorify God*, by owning our whole dependance on him, and to give him thanks for his providence and care of us; but then we must not forget, that God will be more glorified by our good lives when we return home, than by our good words here. You have our Lord's word for this: "In this is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit."

We come hither *to confess and beg pardon for our sins*. Now if we come with an unforgiving temper, or without a full purpose, through the grace of God, of leading a new life, not one sin will be forgiven us, but we shall return home under the displeasure of an offended God, and fall into all the disorders of a sinful life.

We come here *to make an open confession of our faith*; and it is our duty to do so. We profess our belief in God, the Father and Creator of all things. Now if as such we fear, love, honour, and obey him, our faith is right. Only let us not forget, that there are people, "who profess to know God, but in works deny him;" and that such are reprobates.

We profess our belief in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and our Lord and Saviour; but then we must know, and remember, that he is the author of eternal salvation to them, *and to them only*, that obey him.

We profess our belief in the Holy Ghost, as the author of all our graces, who helps our infirmities, enlightens our minds with saving truths, and is the sole principle of a Christian life, and for that end given us at our baptism. But then we must know, that if we grieve him by our evil lives, he will leave us to ourselves, and then what will our faith profit us?

You come to church *to hear God's Holy Word read and explained*, to be put in mind of your duty; to awaken you, if you have

forgot it, into a sense of your danger, and of the happiness you may lose. Now, all this is lost upon you, with the loss of your souls, if you do not return home with a full purpose of leading a life answerable to what you have heard. "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified."

Lastly; you return home with a *solemn blessing* upon you from God by his own Minister, appointed to bless the people in his name. Now; that it may be an effectual blessing to you, let it be your sincere desire and endeavour, that you may grow in grace, that you may live to God's glory by leading an holy life; and you may depend upon it, God the Father will be your preserver, God the Son will be your redeemer, God the Holy Ghost your sanctifier, unto your lives' end.

In short; if the service of the church doth not create in us holy affections, sincere purposes of amending our ways where we have done amiss, and of honouring God, not only with our *lips*, but in our *lives*; all our outward devotions and prayers will stand us in no stead, neither *now*, nor at the hour of death, nor in the day of judgment.

Our Blessed Lord warned his followers against two then reigning evils, and the same reign at this day. Take heed and beware of the doctrine of the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*; that is, of *atheism* and *hypocrisy*,—of a mere *formal religion*, or *none at all*.

*Self-love*, indeed, will be apt to be pleased, and place confidence in the outward duties of religion. The reason is plain: There is not one of these outward duties, whether it be observing the *Sabbath*, or attending the *Church*, or giving of *alms*, or *fasting*, or *praying*; any or all of these are easier to be performed—than taking care of and changing the heart and life, which will require both *prayer*, and *pains*, and *self-denial*, and *watching*, to do it effectually.

Nay; let me tell you, that Satan himself will be well pleased that you should observe all the outward duties of religion, can he but prevail upon you to neglect that holiness of life without which, he knows, no man must see the Lord.—This, assure yourselves, Christians, is *one of the most subtil snares of the Devil*, to tempt men to be satisfied with a shadow of religion without the power.

But then, as we ought not to place religion in a strict observance of these outward duties, and lay too great a stress upon them; so ought we to be very careful not to despise them, as too many do, as if we might be good Christians without observing them.—

<sup>e</sup> Tit. i. 16.

<sup>f</sup> Rom. ii. 13.



This is another snare of the Devil, by which millions of souls have been ruined.

The publick worship is most certainly a duty, and acceptable to God; and when our hearts go along with our bodies, all the outward ordinances are steps to lead us to what is absolutely necessary in religion; that is, a good life, a devout temper, and such as is necessary to fit us for a better world than this we live in.

Jesus Christ has appointed these ordinances, and his Ministers to take care of them, in order to preserve his elect, whom he hath redeemed with his most precious blood.—And dreadful, very dreadful, will be the judgment of all those who enjoy these means of grace and salvation, and are not bettered by them.

In one word: Men may perish in the use of those very ordinances which are appointed for their salvation. I will therefore conclude what I have already said with a few necessary truths, which I would hope you will remember, and carry home with you.

Remember then, that the end of coming to church ought to be a continual advance in piety, growing in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

Outward duties are a proper means of leading to conversion itself; therefore, let us see what effects these have upon our lives, otherwise we may go on in a round of outward duties all our life long, and be no nearer heaven when we come to die.

You hear the commands of God read to you;—you beg him to write them in your hearts, to pardon you when you have been so unhappy as to break any of them. Now, if all this is forgotten as soon as you leave the church, what can you expect, but that God will leave you to yourselves?

If you have confessed your sins with a true penitent heart, it will be seen by your life afterwards that you did so.

You have given God thanks for his mercies and blessings; take heed that you do not use any of them to his dishonour.

We bless ourselves, and we bless God, that we have the liberty of hearing his word,

and our duty, one day in seven. But pray take the word of Christ along with you; “Blessed are they that hear the Word of God, and keep it.”<sup>2</sup> “Every tree (saith our Lord) “is known by its fruit,”<sup>3</sup> and every Christian by the manner of his life.

Every Christian may know whether he is in the way of salvation by such proofs as these following:—He will carefully observe the outward duties of religion; he will, at the same time, take care that his heart go along with his outward actions; for by these he is known, by his heart, and by his life. “In this the children of God are manifest, “and the children of the Devil: whosoever “doeth not righteousness is not of God;” that is, if we are not upright, we are not of God.

And now, to conclude what we have to say upon this subject.

We have been obliged to mention very often the necessity of *good purposes*, of a *good life*, of *good works*, of *good resolutions*. Let me not lead you into a mistake, as if these were in our own power, and owing to ourselves: so far from it, that they are the free gift of God, merited by our Lord Jesus Christ, for all such as in the sincerity of their hearts do pray for them.

To this place we come one day in seven, to pray for these graces and blessings. These, and all other blessings which we stand in need of, God will surely grant us, if we ask them with a sincere purpose of glorifying him in our lives and conversations;—ever remembering, that a Christian profession without a Christian life, is like a tree that makes a great shew, and flourisheth with leaves, but beareth no fruit, and therefore is fit only to be cut down and burnt.

May we all lay these things to heart, that when we come to the house of God, we may *so hear, so pray, so praise his holy name, and purpose so to live*, as that we return home every Lord's Day with his blessing.

And this we beg for Jesus Christ his sake; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

<sup>2</sup> Luke xi. 28.

<sup>3</sup> Luke vi. 44.

<sup>1</sup> John iii. 10.



## S E R M O N XXXII.

SUCCESS OF ALL OUR LABOURS DEPENDS ON GOD'S BLESSING.

LUKE V. 4, 5, 6.

*Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering, said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes,—and filled both the ships.*

**H**ERE is, good Christians, a very instructive passage of Holy Scripture. Here are people toiling and taking pains, and in an honest way, and yet without any success. This will teach us, that the success of all our labour and pains depends upon the will and pleasure of God. “We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing.”

Then here is, in Simon Peter, an instance of great resignation to the will of God; no fretting at their bad success, but waiting with patience for God's good time. Here is also an example of a well-grounded faith in God's power to favour those that depend on him, even when they have the least hopes: “At thy word I will let down the net.” And this should teach us never to distrust the power or the goodness of God, but to live in a constant dependance upon him, even then when our honest endeavours do not succeed.

For observe what follows: “When they had let down the net, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes; so many, as to fill both their ships;” which no doubt did convince them, and should convince us, that *man liveth not by bread alone*, not by his own labour and industry only, (though these are necessary) *but by the Word of God*; that is, by the blessing of God upon his labours.

Lastly; here is an instance of great piety and gratitude for this great blessing. St. Peter falls down “at Jesus' feet, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, “O Lord!” that is, I am verily unworthy of so great a favour; I acknowledge thine infinite power, and infinite goodness; for nothing less than infinite power and goodness could work such a miracle.

But now, however plain and instructive these things are, and though in general every Christian owns, That without the blessing of God no man can prosper;—“that except the Lord build the house, they labour in

“vain that build it;—that it is but lost labour to rise up early and late take rest,” unless God be favourable unto their endeavours;—that we are bound to depend upon God at all times; and to adore him, even when he withholds his blessings;—and that it is our bounden duty to be thankful when he bestows them upon us. Though this is owned by every Christian, yet there are but too many who do not consider what this obliges them to.

Christians do not, for instance, always consider, That if we depend upon God's blessing, then should we never fail to ask his blessing;—then should we never undertake any business which we have reason to believe he will not be pleased with;—that we should never fret when we are disappointed in our expectations;—and that we should never make an ill use of God's favours, whenever he sends them.

That these things are not well considered, is too plain from the practice of the world; where it is seldom enquired,—Am I in the way of my duty? May I beg God's blessing upon this work or undertaking? Shall I injure no man by it? Shall I break none of God's laws, nor do dishonour to my Christian profession, if I succeed in it? A Christian, who dare not ask himself such questions as these, may depend upon it, that whether he succeeds or not, he is in a bad way; he is doing that which he will one day repent of.

Now it being certain, that every body wishes that his labours may be blessed with good success, and that most people are impatient when they are disappointed in their expectations;—it being certain also, that very many who do succeed in their labours and wishes are not always the better for it, and that it would have been a mercy to them if God had not answered them in their expectations;—it will therefore be of use to us to enquire into these particulars: *First*; Why



Why our expectations are not always answered, and our labours are not at all times blessed with good success? And *secondly*; What are the most likely means to prevail with God to bless all our honest endeavours?

Now, in the first place, though industry in our several callings be a duty, and a blessing is promised to it in several places of Holy Scripture, and generally speaking it is attended with good success; yet this is always to be understood with this condition, that God sees it meet, that it will be for his glory, and for our greater good. For God may, and very often does, deny success to our endeavours, for very many reasons.

To make us sensible of our own weakness and inability to help ourselves without his blessing; and to let us see "that neither he that planteth is any thing, nor he that watereth," (in comparison) "but God, who giveth the increase."

God often disappoints our expectations, to make us more sensible of our dependance upon him;—to oblige us to go to him at all times for help;—to hinder us from sacrificing to our own net, as if all our success was owing to ourselves;—to increase our faith, and hope, and patience, and other virtues;—that we may depend upon his word and promises, wait his time which is always best, and cast all our care on him who careth for us.

There is another plain reason why men do not often succeed, even in their most honest employments. They undertake and follow their business without ever asking God's blessing;—they labour and take pains, as if that alone would do;—and God, who knows that such as go about their business without his leave and blessing will, if they prosper, never thank him for their success; he therefore often blasts their labours, and makes all their endeavours fruitless.

This shews the great advantage and necessity of private and family prayers. For why should any person, or family, expect that God should prosper them in the way they go, who will not so much as ask his protection and blessing. One may say, that such persons, such families, cannot prosper, or if they do for a while, it will be to their greater loss and sorrow.

Lastly; it is IN GREAT MERCY TO US, that God very often denies success to our labours. If, for instance, we are in a *bad way*, good success would but harden us, and encourage us to go on in sin; would but make us more wicked, and hasten our destruction. God is therefore undoubtedly merciful in hindering our succeeding in any evil way whatever. And if we are in a *good way*, and are in danger of abusing the favour of God, (which he only knows) it must be

owned to be the greatest goodness in him to disappoint us; neither to hear our prayers for success, nor to prosper our labours.

For most certainly it had been better for millions of people, who are gone to give an account to God for the evil use they made of his favours, if he had withheld them;—if all their endeavours had been blasted with ill success;—if they had wanted that abundance which they made so ill use of;—if they had lived and died as poor and miserable in the eye of the world as Lazarus. And they will, in the words of a Christian poet,

— Bless *their Poverty*, who had  
No reckonings to make when they are dead.

"Ye ask, (saith St. James) and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." And is it not a mercy not to be heard, when men make such petitions? And does not God indeed answer our daily prayers, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil;" when he denies us success in such things as *he sees* would really hurt us, and hinder our salvation?

The Wise man's advice\* would now seem very strange to most ears; "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom;" for that will suggest to thee that riches are a mighty blessing: but, adds he, they will deceive thee at last, "For riches certainly make themselves wings; they fly away as an eagle towards heaven." And is not God kind to those whose wishes for riches and abundance he denies, and so prevents the greatest vexation which men suffer in being deprived of them?

But then if we consider what our Lord has made known to us,—That riches are a mighty hindrance in our way to heaven;—that it is the hardest thing in the world to have them, and not to trust in them;—that they who receive all the good things in this world which their riches afford them, will be tormented in the next. Whoever considers this will be convinced, sure, that God is indeed merciful to all those to whom he denies that success which would be their everlasting ruin.

After all, as it is the most difficult thing in the world to persuade even the best Christians to believe this; and as there is scarce one in a thousand who will be convinced that there is so much danger as God has declared in having our wishes for abundance fulfilled, God is therefore forced to disappoint those who fear him, and for whom he has greater mercies in store; and a time will come when they shall see and confess the kindness of God in denying them that success in all things which they so passionately desired and laboured for.

\* Prov. xxiii. 4.



But are we not, therefore, to labour and pray for success upon our honest endeavours? Are we not to be careful in our business, and diligent in our callings? Yes; most certainly. God, from the creation, designed man for business; he put Adam into the garden of Eden, to dress and to keep it. And though we are taught to pray for our daily bread, yet every man is bound to do something towards obtaining it, or else he may starve, and ought to do so. "If any man, (saith the Apostle) "will not work," will not take some pains in his generation, "neither ought he to eat."

And this will bring us, in the second place, to consider *what are the most proper means to prevail with God so to bless our endeavours, as that they may prosper*; and that we may be able to give a comfortable account of our time and labours to our great Master.

Our first care then must be, that whatever business we undertake be just;—that it be in the way of our duty;—that it be reasonable, and like to end well;—for a man can expect no blessing of God, no good issue, if his aims are unlawful, if he is out of the way of his calling, or if he undertakes things at random, and without good grounds.

Our next care must be, that we undertake and pursue the works of our calling with a conscientious regard to God and to his laws, without which, we have no reason to expect his blessing, either upon our endeavours, or upon the fruit of our labour. "At thy word, (saith St. Peter) I will let down the net." So ought every Christian to say, *At thy word*, and because thou hast commanded me, I will be true and just in all my dealings;—*at thy word*, and because I cannot hope to prosper without thy blessing, I will use no deceitful ways to increase my substance;—I will be ruled by *thy word*, and not by my own corrupt desires, or by the practice or customs of an evil world;—*at thy will and word* I will act, and at *thy word* I will forbear.

The Apostle therefore justly rebukes those who are so foolish and wicked as to lay down projects of what they will do hereafter, without ever saying, *if the Lord will*, we will do this or that. And God himself threatens those with disappointment and bad success in all their undertakings, who trust in an arm of flesh, and neglect to call upon him for a blessing upon their labours.

As therefore we hope for his blessing, let us take the Apostle's advice, "In every thing," in all the affairs of life, "let your requests be made known unto God;" that is, pray unto him, that whatever business you go about may be for his glory and your

<sup>1</sup> Phil. iv. 6.

advantage; that he would direct you both in the choice of what is good, and in the way of doing it; ever remembering, "that it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps."

By doing this, *we consecrate all our labours to God*; and without doing so, all that we do is profane; for it is doing it on presumption that we need not his help, his guidance, and blessing, but that we can do without them.

Lastly; as we hope to prosper in all our ways, we must shew that our dependance is upon God's blessing, not only by our words, but by our deeds; that is, by assigning a portion of our time, and of our labours, to his service. These being the only publick acknowledgments that men can make of their dependance upon God, such as they can be sure will be accepted. For let a man spend never so much time in his private devotions, if notwithstanding he neglects to keep holy the Lord's Day; and let a man be never so liberal to the poor, yet if he refuses to give the tenth to God, (for it is to God, and for his service it is given) he has no testimony of his dependance upon God to shew; or that he owns that it is to the goodness of God that he is indebted for *all his time*, for the fruits of the earth, and the blessings of the seas.

This was what God required of his own people; and when once they began to think these proportions of their time and labours too much for God, they then found, by experience, that it was not *time* and *labour* that made men happy and prosperous, but the blessing of God upon such as obeyed his commands.

It is for this reason that Christians, as well as the Jews, are obliged to set apart one day in seven to think upon God, and to serve him, as one great means of obtaining and securing his favour and blessing. And it was for the same reason, that our pious ancestors thought themselves bound, even by the laws of the Gospel, to dedicate the tythe of all their labours to God, as a publick acknowledgment that they hold of him, and depend upon his blessing.

And let any Christian but read the third chapter of Malachi, and he will be convinced, that there is no surer way of obtaining an abundant blessing upon our labours, than by a conscientious payment of tithes, and by a religious observation of the Sabbath day. He will see for instance, that when men neglect this duty, they are said "to be gone away from the ordinances of God;" [ver. 7.] than it is no less a crime than "robbing of God;" [ver. 8.] that it is one great cause of publick calamities; [ver. 9.] and lastly, to keep close to this duty, is the



the way to prevail with God to pour down his blessings upon us; [ver. 10.] and that there shall be a difference so visible, that men shall easily discern betwixt him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not, by the favours he shews them.

I will conclude this particular with the words of Haggai the Prophet, [ch. i. 5, 6.] "Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, Consider your ways: Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe yourselves, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages, earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes;" that is, Ye are disappointed in every thing ye expect or do: And God himself gives the reason, [ver. 9.] "When ye brought it home, I did blow upon it;" and why?—"because his house and service were neglected."

We shall now consider, *what useful inferences and observations* may be made from this history, and from what has been said upon it. For this we may be assured of, that this miracle was not recorded so much for our admiration, as for our instruction.

And in the first place, this portion of Scripture concerns us of the Ministry in an especial manner. "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing," saith St. Peter; and it is certain, all our pains to instruct and to convert others will signify very little, if God gives not his blessing. And he that hopes to do any good by his sermons, and other instructions, without most ardent prayers to God to bless his labours, will too likely labour to no purpose; but whatever becomes of his flock, he will be in danger of losing himself.

"Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net:" So that if God gives the word, a blessing will follow, let the instrument he makes use of be never so weak, and the success never so unlikely.

Let no man therefore, who calls himself a Christian, undertake any business whatever, where he cannot hope, and with confidence pray God that his blessing may go along with him. What a world of evil and wickedness would this prevent? And what an easy rule is this, by which every body may know whether the business he is about be lawful or not. If a man dare not beg God to prosper him in the way he goes, he may depend upon it, that his way is perverse in the sight of God. So that the most ignorant would not need to be told, that such and such things are unlawful, and that a curse will attend them; his own conscience will tell him, that if he dare not pray for success, success will be a sin and a curse to him.

Let us remember, in the next place, that success in our undertakings is not always a sign of God's blessing. "An inheritance (saith the wise man) may be gotten hastily at the beginning, but the end thereof shall not be blessed." Nor are riches a certain proof of God's favour: They are sometimes given as a curse and a punishment; they are often given as a temptation and a trial; and they are always dangerous things, let them fall into never so good hands. It behoves, therefore, all Christians to consider, how they desire them, how they get them, and what use they make of them.

But especially Christians should consider, that there can be no security, no true satisfaction, in the enjoyment of any thing that is got either by fraud, or by violence, or by injustice; by over-reaching of others, or taking advantage of their ignorance, or of their necessities. For let a man get never so much, if in the doing it he displease God, he is sure to be a loser in the end.

Therefore one would give this good advice to parents and to all others, never to lay up any thing for their children and posterity, which they are not verily persuaded was got by God's blessing upon their honest endeavours; it will be but a curse, and a snare, and a vexation, to them to whom they leave it.

Let us never envy those that prosper in their business better than we do, nor be troubled when our honest endeavours are not blessed with good success. But let us lay down this for a truth, that God will always do what is best for them that fear him, and trust in his goodness; that he governs all events, and that nothing happens without his knowledge.

God has blessings enough ready to bestow upon us, when he, who only knows, sees it best for us. He can make the earth fruitful, the seasons good, and the seas yield their store; and he can put a stop to these blessings, when we abuse them, when we set our hearts upon them, when we fall into a worldly temper, and forget that God by whom we live, and from whom we hope for better things hereafter.

In all our worldly business, therefore, let us ever remember, that we have another life to provide for as well as this; and to set it home upon our hearts, let us also remember the words of our Saviour on another occasion: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

We learn from our Lord himself, that the most lawful business may hinder our salvation, and shut us out of heaven. When, for instance, we prefer worldly business to the care



care of the soul; then the most lawful employment becomes a *sin*, and a *snare*, and a *curse*. We are assured from his own mouth, that the care of oxen, of the farm, and of the family, when they hinder men from serving and obeying *this* call, will as surely shut them out of heaven, as the most notorious crimes.

On the other hand, there is a way by which all the actions of our lives may become acceptable to God. When, for instance, they are done in obedience to him; when we pray him to direct and to bless us in all our ways; when we have an eye to his commands in all we undertake; when we own his hand in all we do; and give him thanks for every blessing we receive.

In short; whoever expects, one day, to hear those joyful words, "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," must be sure to have his master's will always in his mind, and an eye to the account he is to give of all his actions. This will hinder us from following our own corrupt inclinations; from being too eagerly bent upon worldly goods; from following the way of a wicked world in getting them right or wrong; from spending them upon our lusts; and from forgetting the Lord that made us.

To conclude the whole. If people fret when they are disappointed, it is because they do not firmly believe that God ordereth all things of the best. If men are eagerly desirous of the good things of this world, it is because they have not fixed this truth in their hearts, that this life is only a passage to another, to a much better or a much worse. If Christians are over glad when the world favours them, it is a sure sign that they know not the dangers they are exposed to by having the desires of their hearts granted. And lastly, if people make an ill use of God's favours, then they are no longer favours, but snares and temptations, and to be dreaded, rather than enjoyed.

And the conclusion will be, that no man ever was or ever will be happy, who goes out of the way of his duty to increase his substance; or who will not be persuaded that *God's Providence is our best inheritance*.

Grant, O God! that we may, so pass the waves of this troublesome world, that we may at last come to the land of everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour, adoration, and praise, world without end.

## S E R M O N XXXIII.

### THE PERPLEXITY AND DANGER OF THE DOUBLE-MINDED.

JAMES i. 8.

*A double-minded Man is unstable in all his ways.*<sup>m</sup>

**A** Double-minded man; that is, a man who has two minds or wills, one for God, and another for the world; a mind, or desire to go to heaven, and yet a great desire for every satisfaction this life can afford; such a man is *unstable*,—*doubtful*, *perplexed*, *unsettled in all his ways*, or all his life long.

Now, does any body doubt that this is not the character of most men? And perhaps of very many who are looked upon to be very good Christians, and in the sure way to heaven?

I appeal to the consciences of all that hear me, if this has not been their case, if it be not so now? Whether their hearts are not frequently divided betwixt the love of virtue and the pleasures of sense? Whether they are not one while under the power of

religion, and another under the dominion of sin? He must know very little of himself and of religion, who is not sensible of this struggle; and he must still have a less value for his own happiness, who does not desire, *at least*, to bring his mind to a greater certainty, and to resolve one way or other, either that the care of his soul ought to be his great concern, or that he may follow the desires of his heart, and the ways of the world, without any great hazard.

A very little consideration, one would think, might convince any man, that if religion (as we all seem to believe) be necessary to obtain the favour of God, and to escape that punishment which our sins have deserved, why then so much *must* be necessary as may enable us to obtain those ends. And

<sup>m</sup> See Matth. vi. 24. James iv. 4. Heb. x. 23. 1 John ii. 24.



yet, as easy as it is to see this, people will not be persuaded, but that a great deal less religion and concern for their souls will serve their turn than God hath expressly required; and are but too apt (with those mentioned in the book of Deuteronomy<sup>n</sup>) to “bless themselves in their hearts, saying, We shall have peace, though we walk in the imaginations of our hearts.” Notwithstanding the dreadful curse there pronounced against all that shall thus flatter themselves.

I know not, therefore, whether one can do a greater service to the souls of men, than to endeavour to set this matter in a true light;—That such as have any true concern for themselves may be convinced how very dangerous it is, as well as perplexing, to have two minds or hearts, one for God and another for the world; since the man, whose character this is, is as sure to be undone as if he had no religion at all.

To be more effectually convinced of this, let us first consider, that God, being the author of all good to us, expressly requires this of us, *that we should love him with all our heart and soul*; that this love should prevail over all other passions, and should direct us in all our ways. And if the love of God rule in our hearts, these will certainly be the effects:—We shall desire to know the will of God, that we may obey him more faithfully;—we shall fear nothing so much as to displease him;—we shall check our hearts when they run out upon things that cannot profit us. In one word, we shall keep our minds intent upon the place and happiness we were made for, that we may not wander out of our way upon every temptation we meet with.

Now; this is that *single eye, that singleness of heart*, so much recommended by the Spirit of God; by which we are able to make a right judgment of things; by which we are able to see, That the happiness of heaven ought to be our chief aim; that we cannot serve and please God as we ought to do, if our hearts are too much set upon the things of this present world; that if we are distracted betwixt *self-love* and the *love of God*, we shall be miserable both *here* and *hereafter*; and that, how far soever we come short of this *singleness of mind*, so far we shall come short of that peace and happiness we strive for.

For this is God’s gracious design in disappointing us so constantly, whenever we look for happiness any where but in him, *and in the knowledge of his ways*; that finding nothing but uneasiness in every thing else, we may at last think fit to seek for peace where it may be found, namely, *in the way of God’s commandments*.

<sup>n</sup> Chap. xxix. 19.

And having once surrendered our hearts and affections, and all that belongs to us, into the hands of God, we shall then find by experience, that *this* only can give us peace of mind and conscience in the midst of a distracted world;—this only can moderate all our eager desires after things uncertain and perishable;—this only can make us content under the disappointments and crosses, which, by the providence of God, we so often meet with;—and lastly, this, *and this only*, can make the thoughts of *death* tolerable to flesh and blood. In short, this is to follow the advice of our blessed Lord, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness;” to the observance of which he has promised all other blessings,—the blessings of this life, and of that which is to come.

The double-minded man, as his character is, so is his condition, opposite to this we have just mentioned. He dares not for his life have no religion; and yet he cannot find in his heart to give up himself entirely to God’s service. He confesses that it is reasonable, and his interest, to take care of his soul; and yet the pleasures or the business of life will not suffer him to do it in good earnest. If he prays to God, it is out of custom, and not for grace to make him better. He consults his own inclinations in every thing he does; and, while he does so, he knows that he shall never get out of this snare.

One need not describe the unhappiness of such a state of life, which makes a man always displeased and weary with himself; afraid of danger, and yet not resolved to take the way to escape it; striving to avoid the sight of himself, because of the confusion and disorder he finds in his own breast; one while purposing to break through all things that oppose his conversion, and presently diverted by new temptations; wondering at his own inconstancy; lamenting his condition, wishing it were otherwise; resolving to take up for good and all, and soon forgetting his good purposes.

I appeal to your experience, whether this is not the case of very many, who notwithstanding hope that all will be well with them at the last.

But I am afraid they have not well considered the *extreme danger of such a state*. Let us but represent to ourselves a mind faintly resolved to live as becomes the Gospel, and strongly inclined to the desires of the body, —a man who has made a thousand resolutions of reforming, and yet has kept none of them, or but very imperfectly. Let us suppose, (what is really true) that the longer he has gone on in this uncertain way, the greater difficulty he will still find to do what he purposeth: Let us further suppose, (and it is



what generally happens) that he will thus go on *resolving*, and *doing nothing* in good earnest, till death surprizeth him, unprepared for so great a change. And can I describe, or you imagine, a case more desperate or lamentable? And yet (such is our blindness) this is too often the case of those who will not believe they are in danger, only because they fully resolve not to die in that condition; and yet they *do* die in that condition, because they do not apprehend the danger of living in it.

And indeed the danger is greater for this very reason, that it is not *feared*. Great and crying sins, like great and bloody wounds, make people uneasy, until they have taken some care about them: And yet, after all, a state of indifference, a general neglect of duty and religion, *like a gangrene that is scarce perceived*, is as hard to be cured, and makes a man as incapable of salvation, as the most scandalous vices.

Now; this being really the case of an infinite number of people, who, because they are not scandalously lewd or profane; because they are sometimes awakened with a sense of their sins, and lament their infirmities; because they often wish they were better, and faintly purpose to overcome the sloth that hinders their sincere conversion; they do therefore hope there is no *great danger*.—When, God knows, there are none *so far from salvation*, as those that are fallen into a way of *repenting, and returning to their sins again*.

I wish it were in my power to represent unto you, and to myself, the infinite *guilt and danger of such a state*, in which (while a man continues in it) he abuses the goodness of God, makes a mock of the means of grace, does despite to the Holy Spirit, and is in the greatest hazard of being abandoned of God. For the great aggravation of *this sin* is *this*, that a man cannot plead either *ignorance or inability*. If he did not *know* religion to be necessary, he would not do what he does; and if it be necessary, why does he do so little? And if the Spirit of God has enabled a man to do any thing that is good, it should convince him, that if he is not able to do *every thing* that is required of him, it is because he does not, in good earnest, *pray to God to make him both willing and able*.

The truth is, we have a great desire to go to heaven; but then we do not take pains to be convinced, that *without an holy life* we cannot possibly go to heaven. Nay, we often endeavour to impose upon ourselves, and *strive to believe*, that an holy life is *not necessary* at all times; but that one may love God and the world by turns, without any ill consequence; and that this is what people

generally do, who yet hope to be happy when they die.

Now; this is a *delusion* which one should oppose with all one's might: And the way to do it *effectually* is, to find out the *cause* of this dangerous disorder, that one may be able to propose a *proper cure*.

And if we seriously consider it, we shall find this *double mind*, and the *inconstancy* and *unsettledness* that attends it, proceeds first and chiefly *from the want of a true and lively faith*. For *Faith* being the *foundation of religion*, where that is weak or rotten, it is impossible that the religion that is built upon it should be certain or lasting. If we do not believe what we pretend, it is no wonder if we *are not* what we *profess to be*—*sincere Christians*.

A man therefore, who would not deceive himself in a matter of so great concern, would do well to consider, why he is at the trouble of doing any thing that religion requires of him? Why, for example, he worships God at all? Why he is sometimes serious, and begs pardon for his offences? Why at any time he resolves to keep God's commandments?—If we would commune *thus* with our own hearts, we should often find, that we do this, not because *we firmly believe the great truths of religion*, (for no man who has these much at heart can possibly be *double-minded* and *unstable*) but *we take up resolutions of being religious*, either upon some melancholy accident, some solemn occasion, some fit of devotion, or, it may be, upon the apprehensions of some approaching danger.

Now; these are motives which very probably will not last long; and then the good purposes which are occasioned by them are sure to be soon forgotten, and *sin* by turns gets the mastery.

And yet, after a man has acted this part a thousand times, he will hardly be persuaded, but that his *faith* is *sound* and as it should be. He saith, *that he believes the Gospel*, and yet he takes *little care of his soul*: Why then he does *not believe the Gospel*; for the Gospel tells us plain enough, that if we do not work out our salvation with *fear and trembling*, (that is, with a carefulness and concern becoming so great a stake) we shall certainly be ruined. A man may believe that these are the words of the Gospel, and yet live in great unconcernedness; but it cannot be said, with truth, that his *faith* is what it should be.

Another cause of this inconstancy is, a *wilful ignorance of the corruption of our nature*. It is evident enough, that our inclinations to evil are more powerful than to good: Now if we are ignorant of this, or if we do not lay



lay it to heart; how shall we look out for help to enable us to overcome the evil bent of our own will? It is this that has ruined millions before us: They would not see and acknowledge their own *weakness, blindness, proneness to evil*; and therefore they were not concerned to ask help from God, nor accept it when graciously offered them.

Another cause of this evil is, *a too great confidence in our own strength and resolutions*. It is strange, after all, that we, who every moment meet with proofs of our own weakness and inconstancy, should yet *depend upon ourselves*. If we see another man fickle, we know he is not to be depended upon, and accordingly we put no confidence in him;—we know ourselves to be so, and yet we hope we may depend upon ourselves, though this presumption has always ruined those that do so.

I shall only mention one other cause of our inconstancy, and that is, *a most scandalous neglect of the means of grace, appointed and afforded us by God, for overcoming all difficulties, and occasions of sin*. “Without me ye can do nothing,” saith Jesus Christ.\* Do we act as if we did indeed believe this? Do we, distrustful of ourselves, *watch and pray that we fall not into temptation*? Do we *search the Scriptures*, as if we did believe, that in them we have eternal life proposed to us? Do we preserve in our hearts a sense of our dependence upon God, by *praying to him for what we want, and giving him thanks for his favours*? Do we consider *repentance* as a means of escaping the snare of the Devil, and therefore a reason why we should *sin no more, lest we find no more place for repentance*? Do we look upon *mortification and self-denial*, as absolutely necessary for a disciple of Jesus Christ? Do we submit to *discipline*, as if *they that have the rule over us did, in truth, watch for our souls*?

It is because Christians have little or no regard for these precepts of the Gospel, that their religion is *uncertain*, and that they are *unstable in all their ways*.

And it is utterly impossible we should ever be *serious, and constant, and sincere*, in the profession of Christianity, until we take away these *causes* of our *carelessness and inconstancy*; until, in the *first place*, we possess our hearts with a *true and lively faith*; for according to our faith, so shall it be with us.

My meaning is this:—The most effectual way to *prevent* or to *cure* this *double-mindedness* will be, to *keep our minds intent upon those motives or reasons which first inclined us to be serious and thoughtful for our latter end*: The *fear*, for instance, of being for ever undone;—the *hopes* of being happy for ever in

\* John xv. 5.

heaven;—the *goodness and love of God*, who has the compassion of a Father for us, notwithstanding our rebellion:—*These considerations* (while they are warm in our hearts) will not suffer us to be *unconcerned, double-minded, and trifling*, when we see that our souls are at stake.

But *here* is our misfortune:—We hear the Gospel; we believe what is said of the happiness and misery of the world to come; we are awakened by these truths which so nearly concern us, and we resolve to live as becomes such a faith; and so far it is well with us. The seed is sown, but then if it happen to *fall among thorns, the thorns grow up*, that is, the *cares, or the pleasures of this world choke the word*; they divert the mind, and hinder the *will* from hearkening to what the conscience would direct to be done; which is the true reason why we are sometimes very serious, and sometimes very little concerned, for our souls' welfare.

But, for God's sake, let us not deceive ourselves. If, when I lay things to heart, I see *by faith* a necessity of being seriously religious; why then there is still the same necessity, though I do not always see it, nor live as if I believed it.

In short; *eternal happiness, and eternal misery*, are very serious things; and if a man, who will say, I wish I could be as serious as I should be, would but say, *I will often think of what will become of me when I die*; such a man would soon be serious, there is no doubt of it.

It is true, to be able to *say*, and to *do* this, will require a *lively faith*, such as will awaken the *conscience*, work upon the *will*, call back the affections from closing with the world; and, to preserve such a *degree of faith*, a man must *watch, and pray, and deny himself, and strive to keep a pure heart*; all which are very contrary to flesh and blood. But then *it is for our life*. Let *that* be seriously considered, and no difficulties will discourage us.

And let us, in the next place, endeavour to possess our hearts with a just sense of *the corruption of our nature*. He must be very blind who does not see, and very perverse who does not own this, when it is with so great difficulty that we are brought to comply with the will of God; when we can hear of heaven and hell, and be indifferent; when we can see our interest, and neglect it; when we can resist so many motives of loving God, and make all his designs for our conversion ineffectual. All these are sad proofs of a state of *deep corruption*. The knowledge of which is most proper to awaken us, and fill our souls with concern, that we may not flatter ourselves with being secure, when we are *prone to evil continually*; that we may fly to God



God for help, and chearfully comply with the methods he has ordained for our recovery; that we may admire the goodness of God, who had pity upon us in our distress, and make *this* a lasting reason of *loving him with all our hearts*; always remembering, that to lament our condition, without desiring to be reformed, will not excuse but increase our guilt, since all our ailments may be cured, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

But then, *we must not depend upon ourselves*; that, indeed, would be the way to miscarry. "Happy is the man that feareth always;" that distrusteth his own wisdom and strength, and looks up to, and depends upon God. And we shall be apt to do so, if we call to mind, how often our *best purposes* have been forgotten, our most *solemn vows* broken, and very *hopeful beginnings* come to nothing.—Thus it always *has* been, and thus it always *will* be, until, out of a deep sense of our own weakness, we give up ourselves into the hands of our Creator, who has a right to govern his creatures, and who never designed us for self-government and independance.

And, therefore, *as we hope for security, we must make use of those means which he has appointed for confirming us in his grace.*

And here let us not delude ourselves, and depend upon what will not profit us: Such are, a *good faith* without a suitable life; *confessing our sins*, without avoiding temptations; *fruitless purposes*, without taking care to amend; *formal devotions*, which never affect the heart; *imploring God's assistance*, without using our own endeavours; *pretending to love God*, when we love the world above all things; *bearing his word*, without thinking of obeying his laws: These may serve to harden our hearts, but can never confirm us in the grace of God.

But if we would set about the work of our salvation with the seriousness of people who hope to go to heaven, we must suffer our *faith* to set before us the *happiness* and the *miseries* of the world to come; we must strive with all our might that nothing may divert us from thinking often upon these important subjects, which are the foundation of

Christian constancy. For having these before our eyes, we shall not so easily return to the sins we have repented of; for we know who has told us, what a sad state that man is in, to whom an evil spirit returns, after he has been turned out, "with seven other spirits worse than himself." We shall therefore watch against such *backsliding*; we shall pray with the concern of people that are in the midst of dangers; and we shall lose no opportunity of gaining or improving those graces which are so necessary for our security: And above all, we shall commit ourselves and our cause to God every day of our lives, beseeching him, that as often, as we forget ourselves, (which we are but too apt to do) that he would awaken us into a lively concern for our salvation.

To conclude. "Let us use all diligence to make our calling and election sure." And since we know *by faith* that our souls are to live for ever, let us put on resolutions worthy of the *faith we profess*.—A *faith* which undertakes to enable us to break our bonds, though never so strong; which will deliver us from the powers of darkness, set us free from the *bondage of corruption*, and put an end at last to that *struggle* betwixt *nature* and *grace*, which every Christian, who has any knowledge of himself, is sadly sensible of.

If the Spirit of God gives us good desires, let us heartily close with them, and remember, that he is not bound to strive with us for ever: That whatever we think now, if ever we grieve and drive him from us, all our good designs and desires will vanish, and leave us most pitiable subjects of misery.

The good God keep it ever in the hearts of all his servants, that it is *an evil thing and bitter to forsake the Lord*; keep us from presumptuous sins; preserve us always in a serious temper; that being ever mindful of our infirmities and backslidings, we may be more watchful, more diligent, and more importunate for grace; continually mortifying our corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in virtue and true holiness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

2 Pet. i. 10.



# S E R M O N XXXIV.

## THE CREED PUT INTO PRACTICE.

O Lord, increase my Faith! Let me firmly believe myself what I teach others. Let my Faith be truly practical. Pity and awaken all that hold the Truth in Unrighteousness; have Compassion upon the Infidel World; for Christ's sake, the Author and Finisher of our Faith. Amen.

TIT. i. 16.

*They profess that they know God, but in works they deny him; being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate;<sup>1</sup> [that is, void of judgment.]*

**I**F one should say to any Christian, *Deny your God, or your Saviour, or your Faith;* he would *tremble*, he would *abhor* the proposal, and him that made it. He would answer, What! would you have me go directly to hell? And yet, you hear, there are those who “*profess to know God, but in their works deny him;*” and the Apostle assures us, that such are as *abominable*, as hated of God, as if they denied him with their mouths. And St. Peter speaks of some who are so deplorably fallen from grace “*as to deny the Lord that bought them.*” And St. Jude faith expressly, that men of corrupt lives give evident proofs of their apostacy, “*denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.*” And lastly; St. Paul assures us,<sup>2</sup> that such as are cruel and uncharitable to their own kindred that are poor, “*have denied the faith, and are worse than infidels.*”

What are we to learn from all this? Why surely, *to be afraid for ourselves;* lest any of us, while we tremble at the name of apostacy, should live in the practice of such works as are the sure marks of apostacy; lest, while we confess Christ with the tongue, we renounce him in our lives.

Now; one cannot think of a more effectual way, by the grace of God, to prevent this, than to put Christians in mind, and to make them understand, *what it is they profess to believe;* that whenever they do things contrary to their faith and profession, their consciences may fly in their faces, and make them uneasy, and afraid of the danger and ruin that attends them, which will be one good step towards repentance and amendment of life.

I will therefore set before you the words of *that Creed* which we so often repeat; or

those things which every Christian declares he believes, and is persuaded of the truth of; and then we shall more easily see, what works are contrary to such a profession; that is, by what works we deny our God and our faith. We shall also see, how necessary every word of this faith is to a Christian life; how we ought to apply the several parts of the Creed, *and put them in practice;* and how we may judge of the sincerity of our faith, by the manner of our life.

These are the things which, by God's assistance, I am now going to explain to you; and which I desire you will attend to, as things which very much concern every soul of us.

I BELIEVE IN GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY, MAKER OF HEAVEN AND EARTH. I believe; that is, I am as fully persuaded of the following truths, as I am of the truth of any thing that I see with my eyes.

For instance: I am as verily persuaded *that there is a God,*—a Being above this world, and who has created all other beings,—as I am of my own being; and I find, that I resist and do violence to my reason and conscience, if I go about to stifle or deny the belief of a God.

I am therefore as truly persuaded of the *almighty power* of God,—that with God nothing is impossible,—as if I had seen him make the world. I believe also, *that by the same almighty power he still governs, and preserves, and takes care of, every thing that he has made, with infinite wisdom, justice, and goodness.*

This appears in a more especial manner with regard to men; for God having, from the beginning, given them laws; he has either *punished* or *rewarded* them, in all ages,

<sup>1</sup> See Luke xiii. 26. Acts viii. 13. Rom. i. 18. v. 1. 2 Cor. v. 17. 2 Tim. iii. 5. Tit. iii. 8. James ii. 5, 18, 24.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Jude ver. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Tim. v. 8.



according as they obeyed or broke those laws: An account of which we have in the *Holy Scriptures*, the most certain history in the world, an history which, if seriously attended to, will instruct us in all the perfections of God, his *infinite power*, his *wisdom*, his *justice*, his *truth*, and his *goodness*, and will establish us in the firm belief of them.

For example:—We see the *infinite power of God*, in the manner of his making the world, and in the manner it was afterwards destroyed by the Flood. “He spake the word “only, and all things were made; he commanded, and they were created.” And by the same word they were afterwards destroyed.

And then for the *infinite goodness of God*, this appears in this affecting instance especially: When man had broken the covenant of his God, and had thereby lost all hopes of eternal happiness, God was so good as to enter into a new covenant with him, by which he may attain eternal life and happiness, if it is not his own fault.

At the same time, I cannot but be convinced, that *God is infinitely holy*; that he hates all sin, and the workers of iniquity; because I find him every where, and in all ages, punishing sin without respect of persons.

That *God is infinitely just*, I believe, and am assured of, because he has given most righteous laws; and because he renders to every man according to his doings; condemning the wicked, and justifying the righteous.

That *God is true and faithful* to his word and promises, and that his servants may depend upon his word with the greatest assurance, we cannot but believe, forasmuch as we find in all the Scriptures, that not one thing has failed of all that God ever promised:—All came to pass.

And lastly, we believe, that *God sees and knows every thing* that passes in the world; that his eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; that there is no place where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves from his sight; and that the very thoughts and intents of our hearts are all known to God.

Now; these are the things which we profess to believe, when we repeat this part of our Creed. Would to God we could say with truth, that the generality of Christians do not contradict all this in their lives; that they do not, in effect, deny the almighty power, wisdom, justice, knowledge, and goodness of God, by their works!

I will set the truth plainly before you, and let every man judge for himself.

And in the first place, every man who lives without God in the world; that is, who leads a careless life, and lives at all adventures, without considering why he came into the world,—what it is which God expects of him,—what will become of him when he dies. Every such person most certainly *forgets*, and in effect *denies*, that God made him, and that he made him for his glory.

So does every one who is more afraid of man than he is of God; who will venture to do what he knows will displease God, for fear of some worldly loss. Such a one considers not the almighty power of God; that he is able to recompence sufficiently those that suffer any loss for his sake; and that he is able to punish, with the greatest severity, those who fear not his displeasure, nor pay regard unto his laws.

If a man will do that in secret, which he would be ashamed or afraid to do in the sight of men, let him *never so often* profess to believe, that God is every where present, and sees all things that are done, it is plain he denies it in his works, and will one day find to his cost, “that all things were naked and “open unto the eyes of Him with whom “we have to do.”

What will it avail a Christian to say, every day of his life, that he believes in a God *infinitely just*, if at the same time he takes no care not to make this *great and just* God his enemy? If he takes no care to reconcile himself to God, by a timely and a sincere repentance, for the sins by which he has offended him?

I may say with my lips, that I believe in God, who is *infinitely holy*, and who therefore cannot but be displeased with every thing that is wicked or impure; but then, I have no right to be believed when I say this, if I am not careful to keep at the greatest distance from all temptations to sins of impurity.

We call God OUR FATHER; but then we may depend upon it, he will *not* own us for his children, if, in our lives and works, we resemble the Devil; if we dare not trust in his fatherly love and care for us; if we will not submit to what *he* ordereth for our good; if we will not mind what will please him; never ask him for what we want, nor thank him for the life which he has given us, and the means of preserving it. By doing this, we disown him for our Father; we disinherit ourselves; and the *knowledge* and the *belief* of God the Father will only be a curse to us.

This being the case of all those “who “profess to know God, but in works deny “him;” who are not to be distinguished by their lives and actions from the very Heathens who know not God; and who neither  
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fear, nor love, nor worship him as they ought to do; let us consider the cause of this malady, and endeavour to apply a proper remedy.

Now, FAITH being the foundation of all true religion, of all other graces and qualifications for happiness, let every man who hopes for happiness, in the first place, beg of God *this most necessary grace*, and an increase of it daily; a grace without which it is impossible to please God.

In the next place, that we may lead a life worthy of the faith we profess, and of the hopes we *all* have of being happy; let us endeavour to have the several articles of our Creed always present, as much as possible, in our minds.

For, most certainly, the only reason why Christians live without uneasiness in the practice of any known sin is, because they forget, they do not attend to, the truths they pretend to believe. For, would Christians (as holy David professes he did) "Set God always before them;" they would, as he did, bitterly repent of the sins they had committed; and, by an holy example, make amends for the offence they had given.

Let us therefore not be afraid to consider, and to keep in our minds, what it is we believe of God; and we shall soon see the good effects of doing so. It will not only put us in mind of our duty and of our interest, but will be a most powerful means of leading us to close with and to practise it.

For instance: "I believe in God the Father, who made me and all the world." Let me not only say, but calmly consider this. Why then I stand indebted to God for my being; for every thing I have, or value, or hope for. If I stood half so much obliged to any man living, I should highly value him, I should love him, I should strive to please him, I should take all occasions to thank him for his favours, and I should never willingly offend him. And why not this to Thee, my God, my Maker, my Benefactor?

But what did God make me for? Not sure to lead an idle, useless life; I cannot believe that: that would not be for his honour. No. But he made me to manifest in me—his glorious perfections,—his power in creating me,—his providence in preserving me,—his bounty in providing for me,—his wisdom in giving me the very best rules to live by,—his goodness in promising to reward my poor endeavours to please him,—and his holiness and justice in punishing the breach of his most righteous laws.

This is what every Christian professes to believe to be the end of his creation:—To

\* Psalm xvi. 8.

glorify God, by living as becomes a creature of so great, so just, so holy, so good, so bountiful a Creator.

And it must be great unthoughtfulness, when any Christian acts contrary to these ends. For let but a man consider with himself,—The life which God has given me, is not mine to dispose of; it is the Almighty God, who sent me into the world, there to stay just as long as he shall think fit; I dare not therefore, for my soul, attempt to leave my station, till he commands me; I will not shorten that life, which God has given me, by debauchery and intemperance; I will not, I dare not, run the hazard of losing my life on any account whatever, but only when it shall be for the glory of my Maker.

And then when I consider, as I ought very often to do, *That I was made to glorify God*, by doing good in my generation, and by living as becomes the relation I have to him, calling him my Father, as often as I say my prayers, or repeat my Creed: When I remember this, I shall be ashamed and blush to be found doing any thing which may dishonour my Father and my God.

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It is true, temptations are sometimes too sudden and too violent to permit us to make the comparison betwixt the pleasure of sin, and the eternal punishment that is to follow it: But then it is as true, that it is our own fault, that we do not sufficiently think of this when we are in a temper for doing it; and that we do not seriously beg of God to deliver us from evil;—of God, who is Almighty to save, as well as to punish.

Our faith furnisheth us with another motive to abstain from evil, and to be doing good, because our Maker has his eyes continually upon us; *for good*, if we do well; *for evil*, if we do otherways. And happy would it be for us, if we would be careful to live and act as having God the constant witness of our conduct.

We should then reason thus with ourselves:—I will not do this evil, though none but God sees me; my sin will surely find me out, if I do it;—I will faithfully discharge this duty, as in the sight of God, because from him I expect my reward;—I will not speak irreverently of God, who hears every word



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word



word I say; nor will I harbour any evil in my mind, because God knows the very thoughts of my heart;—I would not dare do this in the presence of a man like myself, and shall I not fear to do it in the presence of that God, who can confound and destroy me the moment I sin against him?

A man may be so weak as to think that he has power, and friends, and wisdom, to carry on any design he has in his thoughts, without calling in God to his assistance: He does not consider what God himself has declared, “That there is neither wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord.” If he did consider this, he would ask his leave, his help, his blessing.

Another may fancy himself too big to be punished, or to be brought to own his crimes. A man *could* not, he *would* not, think so, if he would but consider, that the fear of the Almighty God brought two of the greatest Princes on earth to humble themselves for their faults.

The great King Nebuchadnezzar, when God, who had punished him for his pride, had restored him to his kingdom, makes his confession in these words: “I praise, and extol, and honour, the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment; and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.” And King David was so far from exalting himself against God, when he had sinned against him, that he thus expresseth his sorrow: “Mine iniquities are gone over my head, and are as an heavy burthen, too heavy for me to bear: I will confess my wickedness, I will be sorry for my sin.”

Had King Adonibezek considered this truth, *That God is just as well as almighty*, he would hardly have forced God to have brought him to this confession for his barbarous inhumanity, “as I have done, so God hath requited me.” But then why should not every Christian, who professes to believe *this*, *abhor*, and *fear* the consequence of, every act of *injustice*, of *oppression*, of *wrong* to his neighbour? Why should not every Christian when he is tempted, through *covetousness*, through *malice*, through *revenge*, to injure any man, why should he not say this to himself?—If I shall give my neighbour this loss, this trouble, this vexation, the righteous God *will certainly requite me*; either I or my children shall pay for it.

The terrible punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, with fire and brimstone from heaven, is a most remarkable standing proof of God’s holiness and purity, of his almighty power, and purpose, to punish all the sins of uncleanness after the most dreadful manner.

\* Daniel iv. 37.    \* Psalm xxxviii.    \* Judges i. 7.

All Christians, that know and believe this, will *strive*, and *pray*, and *avoid* all temptations, to every degree of these sins. They will remember, that it is the same Holy God, who has declared, that no fornicator, nor adulterer, nor unclean person, has any inheritance in the kingdom of God, but are to have their portion with Devils.

And let no Christian, who believes *the Almighty power of God*, say, that he cannot overcome the corruption of his nature, or the temptations he meets with. If the grace of God will enable a man to overcome all the difficulties he *can* meet with, and if grace may be had for asking, *which are two undoubted truths*; why then whoever, in the sincerity of his heart, prays for grace and strength to overcome the weakness and corruption of his nature, shall certainly have an almighty power to assist him; and then he will have no reason to fear, no reason to complain.

The poor man, *who has faith in God*, will be contented with his condition, though it be never so mean; for he will argue *thus* with himself:—I am the creature of the Almighty God; it is not for want of power that he has given me so little of this world’s goods; I call him my Father, and he permits me to call him so; it must be therefore that he knows that this very condition is the best for me, and therefore I will endeavour to be satisfied.

And the rich man, whose heart is not hardened, and who believes what he saith of God, will *thus reason*:—The same Almighty God, who gave me these riches, is as able to take them away, and very probably will do so, or continue them as a curse to me, if I make them my idol, my God; if I adore them in my heart; if I put my trust, and place my happiness in them; or if I strive to increase them by unjust ways; or if I do not do good with them.

If a Christian is in the greatest distress, and does but call to mind what he believes of God;—that he is *Almighty*; that he is a *Father*; that he sees all our distress; that he is faithful to his promises;—though he cannot perhaps say, as holy Job did, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;” yet he will not utterly despair of a change for the better, because his hope is in God.

When a Christian considers how plentifully God Almighty has provided for all his creatures; what care he takes of them, in so much as that the least of them does not suffer without his knowledge, without his leave; how justly shall we not reproach ourselves in the words of Christ, “Shall he not be concerned for us? O we of little faith!”

Can



Can my weakness be greater than the Almighty can help? Can my sins be greater than infinite goodness can pardon? Can my enemies be more and stronger than he can subdue? Are my wants greater than the Almighty can supply? Need I go to the Devil for want of help, when the Almighty God is ready to help me? Need I take unjust ways to provide for myself, or my children, when God has promised to be a Father to them and to me, while we behave ourselves like children of so holy a Father.

If I am at any time going to do a thing which I have reason to fear will displease God, let this thought restrain me; Is it not the Almighty God that I am going to offend? Shall I provoke the Lord to anger? Am I stronger than he? When I observe the great patience of God, in sparing us when we deserve punishment, I shall not be so foolish as to imagine that it is for want of power, for he is Almighty; but because he is infinite goodness, he waiteth to be gracious, until his despised mercy and justice shall oblige him to take vengeance, and then I shall feel his power, when it is too late to avert it by repentance.

Christians too seldom consider how many sins they would certainly have fallen into, had not God interposed his almighty grace. We have, every soul of us, the seed of every wickedness within us; and it is God who hinders them from springing up, and from becoming our ruin.

It is God, the Almighty God, who only can oppose the number, the power, the malice, and the snares of evil spirits, which are always attempting to ruin us; and would certainly do so, did not we dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, under the protection of one who is able to save. In confidence of whose protection a Christian may be easy amidst all the disturbances the world is subject to, and may say with David, My help is not from man, but cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

But then, lest the mighty privilege we Christians enjoy, of having the honour to call the Almighty God our Father, should make us proud of ourselves, and in comparison of those who know not God; let his almighty power repress our insolence: for what am I in comparison of the Almighty? What have I, that I have not received from him? And what have I not to fear, lest he should deprive me of his grace?

By the righteous judgment of God, the Heathens were deprived of that light which they abused: "They knew God, but they glorified him not as God," saith St. Paul; and what was the consequence? why, "God

"gave them up to a reprobate mind, to commit all iniquity with greediness."<sup>b</sup>—Christians should always fear every one for himself, lest this should come to be his own case.

And indeed it is but too plain, that the generality of Christians forget that they have a rule of faith to direct them, *what to believe of God*, and of *his infinite perfections*; and they will find to their cost, that it will be no advantage to them, to have been distinguished from infidels by a rule of faith which they never minded, and which had no influence upon their lives.

Let me therefore, before I conclude this part of the Creed, put you in mind of a few truths and inferences, which I wish we may all remember, and carry home with us.

When we acknowledge God to be Almighty, let us consider what a dreadful thing it must needs be, to have the Almighty God for our enemy; one who can destroy both body and soul in hell. And then, how happy will all those be, who have an all-powerful God their friend, to direct, to support, and to reward them! A man must have no value for his soul, whom this belief does not influence.

Let us consider further, what a dishonour we do to God, to call him our Father, and to behave ourselves like the children of Satan. Infidels will conclude from hence,—If these be the children of God, and hope for salvation from believing in him, who need despair of going to heaven? Let us rather remember, that our Almighty Father has given his children rules to live by; that they are not to follow their *own* will, but *his*, and that their happiness depends upon doing so.

When we call God our Father, let us consider, that our inheritance is in heaven. This should make us less fond of an earthly inheritance; at *least*, we should not think of setting up our rest here.

If God is my Father, I have nothing to fear, while I strive to please him. I will trust in him, and I will go to him with the confidence of a child.

If every Christian has a right to call God his Father, then every Christian is our brother, and has a right to our *love*, and to our *help*, in his way to heaven.

We profess to believe, that God is the Creator of all things. Every one who seriously believes this will not dare to abuse any of God's creatures, nor wantonly destroy any thing that God has made. Made indeed they were for the use of man; but whoever destroys creatures that are neither

<sup>a</sup> Rom. i. 21.

<sup>b</sup> Rom. i. 25.



*hurtful when they are living, nor useful when dead, certainly sins against his and their Maker.*

Let us rather glorify God *in* and *for* his creatures. The very religion of heaven consists in this: "Thou art worthy," say the glorified Saints in the Revelations, "Thou art worthy to receive honour, and power, and glory, for thou hast created all things." And we shall do this in the most humble manner, when we consider, that of all the creatures which God made, man alone behaved himself so ill, as to provoke God to say, "That it repented him that he had made him." My God! And shall not sinful man be afraid, and bitterly repent, that ever he offended and provoked so great a God!

We should indeed have repented of, and bewailed our lost condition to all eternity, had not Almighty God, to manifest his infinite goodness, accepted of the mediation of his beloved Son, by whom we have been restored to the favour of God.—But this must be the subject of another discourse.

In the mean time, let every one of us examine himself *upon this part of his Creed*; and see what fruits of this faith he has to shew. To live by faith, is to live as if we did indeed believe the things which we profess to believe.

Well then, let me ask myself, Do these truths which I profess to believe, do they really affect my heart? Do I truly fear the Almighty God; that is, do I fear to offend him? Am I not more afraid of temporal evils than of the wrath of God? Do I really love God; that is, do I desire and strive to please him? Do I look upon him as the fountain of all good; that is, do I pray to him for what I want, and give him thanks for the blessings I receive? Do I shew that I believe his infinite wisdom, by my leaving the choice of all the blessings I hope and pray for to him? Do I own his fatherly love and authority over me; that is, do I submit to all his dealings with me without murmuring? Do I own that God sees all that I do; that is, do I live as in his presence, not daring to do any thing that I believe will displease him? Do I shew that I am convinced of his infinite patience, and long-suffering, by laying hold of the present opportunity of returning to my duty?

We lament the blindness of the Heathen world which know not God. Do we truly value that *light*, and that *word*, by which we are come to the knowledge of God, and of his glorious perfections? Do we hear the word of God with attention; and do we beg of God the grace to understand it, and to incline our hearts to observe the lessons we there learn? Why has God thus made him-

self known to us, but that we may fear, and love, and adore, and praise him, and pray to him, and put our whole trust in him?

And I pray consider Christians, what a mighty blessing it is, that we are not left to ourselves, and by our own reason, to find out God; but God has been so good as to manifest himself unto us in his Holy Word; and to discover his *almighty power*, his *wisdom*, his *goodness*, his *justice*, his *faithfulness*, and his *holiness*, in his government of the world.

Consider how very thankful we should all be for the benefit of these Holy Scriptures, in which every soul may come to the true knowledge of God, and the way of salvation. Where *unbelievers* may be convinced of the providence of God throughout all ages, by the fulfilling of innumerable prophecies. Where *sinners* will find reasons to awaken them, by seeing the power of the Almighty manifested in the punishment of the impenitent. Where the righteous may learn to depend entirely upon the protection of God, by seeing his infinite goodness towards such in all ages. Where all may learn to believe, and fear, and love, and worship the Lord Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth.

We enjoy the benefit of all the creatures, without so much as thinking of him that made them. Which of them could we want, without being miserable? The Sun gives us light and heat; the Air, breath and life; the Earth and Seas, food; the rest of the creatures are all designed for our use and benefit.

Shall we not then glorify God in his works,—take notice of his providences,—admire his infinite wisdom,—be thankful for all his mercies,—and dread to provoke a power that can ruin us?

Shall we not desire and endeavour to please a most gracious God, who has promised eternal happiness to his faithful servants?

Shall we not imitate his *holiness*,—depend upon his promises,—take care not to abuse his patience and long-suffering?

Shall we not beg of God to increase our faith; to manifest himself and his glorious perfections every day more clearly to us, that as we grow in years we may grow in grace?

And shall we not abhor and avoid the company and the conversation of all such profane people as may weaken our faith, whether by their wicked examples or loose principles?

Let us look upon all such as the Devil's instruments, doing his work, and promoting his interests and his kingdom. All who profane the name of God, who make a mock of sin, who mind not his word, who regard



regard not his worship, who observe not his day, who despise his ministers and his ordinances: These are people of no faith, no religion; have nothing to restrain them from the greatest wickedness, but the fear of man, or their own carnal interests.

And believe it, Christians, for an undoubted truth, that such as have no true faith in God, who do not shew it by their lives, have no true religion, no honour, no justice, no truth, no humanity, no sincerity, to be depended upon.

As for ourselves, for all such as profess to know God, to believe his word, and to hope for his mercy; let us lay this down for a most certain truth, that he who does not shew his faith by his works, has no proof of his sincerity, or of his acceptance with God.

My God! if this be so, how few are there who truly believe the Creed they profess?

Vouchsafe, O God, by thy almighty grace, to awaken all such as hold the truth in unrighteousness; who have a form of faith and of godliness, but deny the power thereof. Preserve all Christians from such fatal blindness; and deliver all such as are under the power of it.

May these saving truths which we believe be received in all the world, that thy glorious name may be adored by the Heathens!

O God, the Creator of all, have mercy upon all whom Thou hast made, for the Lord Jesus' sake, the redeemer of all. To whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

## S E R M O N XXXV.

### THE CREED PUT INTO PRACTICE.

O Jesu benigne! Cœlesti tuo verbo et spiritu illumina me, ut veram fidei indolem et naturam in corde meo perferentiam, et ex viva experientia gregem meam pascam. Misere gentium que sedent in tenebris, misere eorum qui fidem ore jactant, operibusque divinis destituti misere seipsos decipiunt. Amen.

JOHN xvii. 3.

*This is Life Eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.\**

**L**IFE Eternal is what we all hope for, what we all promise ourselves. Would to God, we could all be persuaded seriously to think how we may attain it;—that we could be persuaded to believe, that none are ever like to attain eternal life and happiness, but such as make it their great concern to know and to love God;—and that none can know and love God as they should do, but such as study to know Jesus Christ, and what he has done for us: The eternal lot and portion of every man living being in the hands of Jesus Christ: he himself assuring us of it; and “that God has given him power over all flesh, that he may give eternal life to as many as God shall give him.”

It behoves us, therefore, as much as our souls are worth, not only to know the only true God the Father Almighty, but also Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent to seek and to save us.

And this is that part of our Creed, which I shall at this time endeavour to explain to

you; and after such a manner, that you may see the necessity, not only of confessing with your mouth the Lord Jesus, but of leading a life answerable to such a profession, as you hope for eternal happiness.

I have, in a former discourse, endeavoured to shew how the knowledge and belief of God the Father Almighty ought to affect us; how his infinite power, his wisdom, his holiness, his justice, his faithfulness, ought to influence our practice. But then we are to consider, that to know God, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, would only fill our souls with fearful apprehensions of what may become of us when we die.

For to know that God is infinitely holy, and infinitely just, as well as powerful; and at the same time to know that my nature is extremely corrupt, and prone to sin continually; that as such, so holy and just a God can take no pleasure in me; and that of myself I know neither how to please, nor how to appease him, when offended; this

\* See Luke xiii. 26. John i. 12. viii. 24. xiv. 1. xvii. 2. Acts. xv. 9. 1 Cor. xvi. 22. 2 Cor. v. 7. 2 Pet. ii. 9. 1 John v. 4. 5. Jude ver. 4.



must needs fill my soul with fear for myself. —And this is the case, this the condition, of every man, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ: the case, not only of Jews, Turks, and Infidels, but of all Christians, who know not that they want a Redeemer, who are not sensible of the blessing of a Redeemer, and of God's infinite goodness in sending his own Son—to shew us the way to eternal life, to teach us by his precepts and by his example, and to make atonement for our sins.

Now, it being impossible to make any Christian sensible of these things until he is first made sensible of his deplorable condition by nature, I will first set before you, in as short and plain a manner as I can, the *true*, that is, the very miserable condition of man, of every man living, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ.

It is common, and it is easy, to say, *We are all sinners*, and to say this without being much concerned, without feeling our misery, without fearing the consequence, and even without any thoughts of amendment. And indeed there is nothing which more plainly shews the corruption of our nature, and the danger we are in, than this does,—to own that we are sinners, and not to fear what must follow.

For to be a sinner is to be at enmity with our Creator; with a most *holy* God, who cannot but hate sin; with a most *just* God, whose righteous laws we have broken; and with an Almighty God, who can destroy us, both body and soul; who cannot but be highly displeased to see his own creatures, who know his will and his power, yet going on to provoke him.

It is not material now to enquire, how we came to be such corrupt creatures. It should be enough, one would think, to awaken us to know that we are such.

To know, for instance, that of ourselves we are prone to evil continually; that the laws of our Creator are grievous to us; that we find a pleasure in doing the very things which he has forbidden us:—To know, moreover, that every soul of us have, within ourselves, the seed of every wickedness that ever any other man was guilty of; and a seed which will certainly spring up, and bring forth fruit, upon a suitable temptation, if not prevented by the power of God; we being all of one *race* and *make* with those who we are convinced are going headlong to destruction.

The consequence of all which *is*, that men need not take pains to go to hell; they will go thither of course, if they make not resistance; and resistance they *will not* make without the grace of God.

All this is too plain to be denied; and daily experience should convince us, that there are no remedies within ourselves for these evils, and the fears they cause in us; since neither the anger of God who made us, nor the fear of everlasting misery, have, too often, had any power to restrain men when they are eagerly bent either upon their pleasures, or worldly interests.

This, we say again, is the condition of every man living without the knowledge of Jesus Christ. And every man, whose eyes God has opened to see *this* to be his sad condition, can have no peace in his soul, till he can have some hopes of a way to escape the wrath of Almighty God, which he has so much reason to fear. It is *then*, and not *till then*, that he will see the blessing of a Redeemer; that is, of some one who can make his peace with God; who can obtain his pardon for what is past; and enable him to live in the favour of God for the time to come.

And this none but Jesus Christ could do; and Jesus Christ has done this for us. He has prevailed with God, his Father, to be reconciled to us; he has obtained for us, that our repentance when sincere shall be accepted; that none of our past offences shall be remembered against us; that we shall have all the help we shall stand in need of, to carry us through the difficulties we shall meet with; and that, when we die, our poor endeavours, however imperfect, *if sincere*, shall be rewarded with eternal life and happiness.

And now, Christians, you are (one would hope) better prepared to understand this part of your Creed concerning Jesus Christ; and the amazing mercy of God, in seeking the welfare of his rebellious creatures; and in sending his own Son, to take our nature upon him, by being born of the Virgin Mary.

You will be better able to perceive the reason of all that Jesus Christ *did* and *suffered* while he was upon earth; and that it was purely for us, and for our salvation, that he came down from heaven. It was to declare God's readiness to forgive the greatest sinners upon their repentance, and return to their duty. It was to put us in the way of happiness; to give us such *rules*, and to direct us to such *means*, as are necessary and sufficient to lead us through all the difficulties we shall meet with; and to let us know, what things they are which will certainly shut us out of heaven.

Particularly, he assured us, that it is no great matter what our lot is in this world, provided we can secure the favour of God; for that this short life is only a state of trial, and a passage to a life that is to last for ever.

To



To convince us more effectually of this, he made choice of a life of poverty himself, and was very easy and content with any thing that the providence of God afforded him.

And to convince mankind that it is no indifferent matter whether they close with this mercy of God or not, he made known this important truth, which before they knew little of,—That after this life is ended, we shall, every soul of us, be adjudged to an everlasting state of happiness or misery, according as we shall have behaved ourselves in this world.

And to assure us of the truth of all this, after he had wrought infinite miracles to shew that he came from God, he sealed the truth of these things with his own blood; for he laid down his life for us, and suffered the punishment of death which *we* had deserved; the punishment and sentence which God had passed upon Adam and all his posterity for *his* sin and disobedience.

And God, to give us the utmost assurance that all which he had *told* us was true, and that what he had *suffered* for our sakes was accepted, RAISED HIM THE THIRD DAY FROM THE DEAD, and in the sight of all his disciples, HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN.

And to convince the whole world, that HE SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD; that is, that he hath all power in heaven and earth, he sent down the Holy Ghost to enable his disciples to do the same wonderful things that he had done amongst them; which Holy Spirit will continue to *guide*, and *protect*, and *assist*, his faithful servants, until his COMING AGAIN TO JUDGE BOTH THE QUICK AND THE DEAD.

These are the things which we believe concerning our Lord Jesus Christ; and our salvation depends upon believing them. Our Lord himself saith expressly, “He that believeth not,” that is, when these truths are preached to him, “he that believeth not, shall be damned.”

But then, let us not deceive ourselves in this. It is not enough barely to *believe* these things, unless our lives be answerable to our faith: “Not every one (saith our Saviour) that saith unto me, Lord, Lord,” that calls himself a Christian, “shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

And this, good Christians, is what I chiefly aim at in the discourse I am now upon; to shew you, *how this part of our Creed may be put into practice*; what powerful motives it furnisheth us with, to make us *holy*, that we may be *happy* eternally.

<sup>a</sup> Mark xvi. 16.

<sup>b</sup> Matth. vii. 21.

*We believe that our Redeemer was the Son of God. We are commanded to honour the Son even as we honour the Father.* And we have the highest reason to do so; for if the Son of God had not undertaken our redemption, it might have been truly said of us, as it was of Judas, “It had been better for us that we had never been born.”

“Surely, (saith God in the parable, Mark xii. 6.) “they will reverence my Son.” And dearly *they* paid for it that did not. God grant that we, being warned by the terrible destruction which the Jews met with for rejecting the Son of God, may reverence him in all his offices of *Prophet, Priest, and King*, and in every thing that belongs to him;—that we may reverence his *Word, as the Word of our Salvation*;—that we may reverence his authority in his *Ministers*, as they are the Ministers of reconciliation betwixt God and man;—that we may reverence his *laws*, his *example*, his *ordinances*, which are the means of our salvation.

All the Angels of God are commanded to worship him. And shall we poor mortals neglect to do it? *We*, for whom he has done so much! *We*, for whose sins he was for a time set below the Angels, “that he might taste death for us;” shall not *we* worship him in our lives, as well as by our profession? Should not this fill our souls with unspeakable gratitude?

How much reason therefore had St. Paul to give this direction to the church of Corinth: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha;” that is, let him be excommunicated. Terrible sentence! To be deprived of the mercy of God, and the merits of Jesus Christ.—And yet how many Christians are there, besides such as are excommunicated, who wilfully lay themselves under this sentence, by their not loving the Lord Jesus, by not shewing it in their lives! For in vain we flatter ourselves that we believe in Jesus Christ, *if we do not the things which he commands us*.

And because our obedience will always be answerable to our love of God, therefore has God, by giving us his own Son, given us the *greatest reason* to love him, that we might have the greatest reason in the world to obey him.

“Ye call me Master and Lord,” saith our Saviour; “ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well, for so I am.”—Pray, good Christians, let us consider what this means.

If we, from our hearts, acknowledge Jesus Christ to be our *Master*, that is, our *Teacher*, why then we shall never doubt the truth of

<sup>c</sup> John v. 23.

<sup>d</sup> Heb. i. 6.

<sup>e</sup> John xiii. 13.



any thing which he has taught us, though never so strange to our reason and understandings; but we shall receive it as coming from the Son of God, who neither *can* be mistaken himself, nor *can* he misinstruct us.

If we acknowledge him to be our *Lord*, then are we not *our own masters*, but we are bound to obey him in all things which he has commanded.

And let us never forget a truth which he has told us, "that no man can serve two masters;" and that *he* is *our Lord* whom we love most. And therefore, "whoever lives in sin, is the servant of sin," the servant of Satan, let him pretend what he will.

To proceed:—The greatest on earth do confess, that Jesus is their Lord and King; that they are his servants; that therefore all their greatness, all their power, cannot secure them against his anger, if they take part with his enemies. And the poorest Christian has the *same Lord*, the same Son of God, for his pattern and protector; and therefore is not to be dejected himself; not to be despised and trampled on by others.

Let us all therefore estimate the greatness of our high calling, by the greatness and the majesty of *the Lord* whom we serve.

*Our Lord* is the only Son of God: we need not fear the powers of hell, nor all the evils that human nature is subject to. He is almighty—he *can help, support, and deliver* us. How *wicked* then,—nay, rather how *foolish*—are they, *who will not have this Man to reign over them?*<sup>b</sup> For this is the language of an infinite number of people.

This is the language of all such as choose to be slaves to sin, and to Satan, rather than serve the Son of God; and especially of all such as would rob our Lord of his divinity, and all faithful Christians of the inestimable comfort of having the eternal Son of God for their advocate with the Father.

These are they on whom this sentence is already passed: "Those mine enemies, which would not I should reign over them, bring hither and slay them before me."

This sentence has already been executed upon the nation of the Jews in a most astonishing manner. Christians must expect even a severer judgment, if they deny or despise the Lord that bought them.

When we consider and profess that Jesus Christ took our nature upon him, by being born of the Virgin Mary, we truly conclude, that great was the love of God for his poor creatures, since he sent his own Son from heaven to seek and to save us.

<sup>b</sup> Luke xix. 14.

But then we should further consider, what a sad condition we were in, when this was the only way which infinite wisdom could choose; that his own Son should leave the glories of heaven, and should undergo all the miseries of life, to save his sinful creatures from death eternal.

And these are the reasons why the church of God makes use of the song of the blessed Virgin in her daily service; to put us in continual mind of the blessings and uses of Christ's incarnation. For every Christian, in an humble sense of his own unworthiness, and of God's love, may truly say as she did: "My soul doth magnify the Lord; for he hath regarded," he hath greatly honoured, "the low estate" not only of the Holy Virgin, but of all mankind, by taking our nature upon him, and uniting it to his divine nature, "according to his promises which he made to Abraham, and his seed for ever."

By all which we are perpetually put in mind of God's faithfulness to his promises,—of his passing over those that think highly of themselves,—and of his accepting such as are humble, and sensible of their own unworthiness.

But the highest instance of the love of God for us miserable sinners is, *that Jesus Christ was crucified for us, that he died and was buried*. That he suffered for *our* sakes, and in *our* stead, and what *our* sins had deserved that we should suffer.—If this does not affect our hearts, and our practice, it is a sure sign our salvation is not much regarded by us.

As we love our souls, therefore, let us consider, that the sufferings of Christ discover plainly to us the very dreadful nature of sin; and that God cannot but hate it, since his justice required such an atonement.—That therefore Christians ought to hate it, and every degree of it, as they hope for any benefit from Christ's sufferings.

Jesus Christ laid down his life, that he might obtain of God this favour for us, *that our repentance might be accepted, instead of a perfect obedience*. If therefore we do not repent, and forsake our sins, we are in the same sad condition as if Jesus Christ had never died for us.

The design of Christ's death was to redeem us; as how? Why; "by redeeming us from sin, and purifying to himself a peculiar people," a generation of men freed from the pollutions of the world, and "zealous of good works."

If, through our own fault and negligence, the merits of Christ's death have not this effect upon us, we are still under the power

<sup>1</sup> Titus ii. 14.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. 27.



of Satan, under the bondage of sin, and utterly incapable of eternal life and happiness.

In the next place let us consider, that the sacrifice, which was offered for us, was *the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world*. This ought to be such an assurance that God is reconciled to us, as a voice from heaven to every particular soul cannot give a greater satisfaction.

Let us, therefore, whenever the memorial of Christ's death and mercies are celebrated in the *Lord's Supper*; let us be careful to apply them every one to himself, saying in our hearts, This body was given for *me*, this blood was shed for *me*; the Priest, the Minister of God, assures me of it, and I do faithfully believe it.

It was for this reason Jesus Christ *ordained* this holy Sacrament, that we might be often obliged to remember his *Love*, his *bitter sufferings*, the occasion of his death, the misery we have escaped, the pardon he has obtained, and the graces and the happiness he has purchased for us;—that calling these things to mind, we might be obliged, by all the motives of interest and gratitude, to love him with all our hearts, and to put our whole trust in him.

Then will our own death, whenever it shall happen, be a blessing to us, when nothing in this world besides can help or comfort us, but a firm faith in Jesus Christ, and what he has done and suffered for us.

We shall then see the importance of our faith, and set an infinite value upon the sufferings of Christ, when we can say with the Apostle, "I know in whom I have believed;" even in the only Son of God, who came to seek and to save lost sinners, who gave his life for us, who has prevailed with his Father to accept our repentance, whose grace I have experienced in my life, whom I have all my life long intreated to plead with God for my pardon, whose gracious assistance I have begged and prayed for against the attempts and the accusations of the Devil, and the fears of my own conscience; and in hopes, that when he shall come again to judge the quick and the dead, that He, who in our nature had experienced our frailty, and the temptations we are subject to, that He will accept of my sincere, though imperfect obedience.

We should easily understand how great an advantage it would be to have the Son of a King our friend with his Father. It does not appear that the generality of Christians are sensible of what it is to have Jesus Christ, the Son of God, for a Mediator with God his Father.

In *this* faith, and with *these* hopes, I submit to death, as a punishment which, as sin-

ners, we are all justly condemned to; but then I offer it as a sacrifice for sin, which I am confident God will accept of, in union with that of his own Son, for whose merits I trust he will be propitious to me.

And therefore I make it one of the petitions of my prayers, that when I come to die, I may with humble confidence make use of my Saviour's dying words upon the cross, "Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit;" or the last words of St. Stephen, in imitation of his Lord, "Lord Jesus, receive my Spirit."

My God! grant that I, and all that now hear me, may die in this faith, and with these dispositions. But then let us all remember, that as we desire our death, like that of our Saviour and his first Martyr, should be a sacrifice of faith, of love, and obedience, we must take care to make our lives so too, or we shall be dreadfully disappointed.

And now to return to the remaining articles of this part of our Creed; namely, That Jesus Christ being crucified, HE DESCENDED INTO HELL, AND ROSE AGAIN THE THIRD DAY FROM THE DEAD; that is, his soul underwent the condition of the souls of all men when separated from the body.

The comfort and hope we draw from hence is *this*; that since Jesus Christ underwent the same fate that we *must* do, then we conclude with the Apostle for *certain*, "That if the same Spirit which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead dwell in us; then he that raised up Christ from the dead, shall also quicken our mortal bodies."

Here is our hope, *this* our confidence; only let us, as ever we expect to die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory, let us not "grieve that Holy Spirit," which was given us in baptism, "whereby we were sealed unto the day of redemption;" and which alone can raise us to life eternal.

HE ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND SITTETH AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD THE FATHER ALMIGHTY. What a comfort is here for sinners! Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and took our nature upon him; who in our nature felt all our infirmities; who, to satisfy the justice of God, suffered the death which our sins had deserved; this Jesus, this Saviour, is now in heaven, and ever liveth to make intercession for us.

So that the greatest sinner, whose heart God has touched with a sense of his danger, and who is truly concerned for having offended so good and gracious a Father; such a one need not despair, if he flies to God for

\* Rom. viii. 11.

mercy



mercy and pardon for his Son's sake, with full purpose of heart of living as becomes a Christian for the time to come.

And receive it, Christians, for a most certain truth, that no man ever prayed for *pardon*, for *faith*, for *strength* to overcome his corruptions, for *perseverance*; no man ever prayed for these, or any other grace in the sincerity of his heart, and for Christ's sake, but he had his petitions granted.

For Jesus Christ has all power with God; that is the meaning of his *SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD*; he is our own flesh and blood; he loves us as his brethren; he loved us so well as to die for us; all our enemies are under his power; he has every thing that he can ask of God, and cannot be refused; and has given us this faithful promise, that whatever we shall ask in his name, that he will do for us.

But even this is not all we hope for by his going to heaven. In his last dying speech to his disciples, he assures his faithful followers,<sup>1</sup> That he ascended into heaven in order to prepare a place for them; that they shall share with him the blessings of heaven to all eternity.

What have we now to do, good Christians, but to endeavour to prepare ourselves for that happy state? And not to lose the time in which we have to do it in, lest we for ever come short of it.

What should hinder us from doing this? Shall the pleasures I hope for from the world tempt me to neglect the concerns of my soul and eternity? Not sure, when I consider, that these are but for a very little while, those of heaven for ever.

Shall my own weakness discourage me? Shall the multitude of my enemies, their malice, or their power, make me afraid? Not if I believe that the grace of God is sufficient to enable me to overcome all difficulties; and that Jesus Christ has obtained this grace for all that ask it in his name.

Do my sins make me despair of pardon? That would be unreasonable indeed, when I am assured, that I have an Advocate with the Father, even his own beloved Son, pleading for me.

Shall the sense of my own unworthiness make me fear that heaven is too holy a place for such a miserable creature as I am ever to be admitted there? Let this rather encourage me to be as holy as I can, because Jesus Christ, who is to be my Judge, has promised to allow of a sincere endeavour after holiness.

And then let me remember, that He *who is gone to prepare a place for us* has declared,

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 2.

“that in his Father's house are many mansions;” and if by his grace, I am thought worthy of the very lowest place in heaven, I shall be sufficiently happy, and shall have cause to be eternally thankful.

And now you see the wisdom of that church of which you are members, in obliging us so often to lay before God the meritorious passages of his Son's life and death, in order to prevail with him to deliver us from the evils which we have justly deserved; and which we should always repeat with the greatest devotion.

And if we do so, he cannot deny our requests, when we plead his *incarnation*, his *nativity* and *circumcision*, his *baptism*, *fasting*, and *temptation*, his *agony* and *bloody sweat*, his *cross* and *passion*, his *precious death* and *burial*, his *glorious resurrection* and *ascension*. We cannot think too often of these mysteries; we cannot too often repeat them. If we do it with attention, it will increase our *faith* and *hope* in God; and is the only way of having success at the throne of grace.

The last article of this part of our Creed is expressed in these words; *FROM THENCE HE SHALL COME TO JUDGE THE QUICK AND THE DEAD*; upon which depends our eternity; and therefore to be minded with the greatest seriousness. For at the coming of Jesus Christ again, all men shall rise with their own bodies, and shall give an account of their own works; and “they that have done good, shall go into life everlasting;” and they that have done evil, into everlasting fire.”

And will not this awaken Christians? Shall we profess this truth, and yet be careless, and sleep on, and die in our sins, and rise again, only to be miserable? God forbid: Rather let the knowledge and the belief of a *future judgment* have its *saving*, its *proper effects* upon us.

For example:—My own conscience tells me that I have done many things, which, if not forgiven, will rise up in judgment against me. Well then; what have I to do, but to endeavour to prevent the judgment of God, by judging and condemning myself, by confessing my sins, by imploring his gracious pardon, and by bringing forth fruits answerable to amendment of life?

And every Christian who would not have this article of his Creed to be a plague and a torment to him, ought every day of his life to have his accounts in some sort of readiness, that he may live with comfort, and die free from despair. And to make our accounts easier, we should do well always to ask leave of God before we undertake any thing of moment. This would secure his blessing,



bleffing, if we are in a good way; and hinder us, if we are in a bad.

If a Christian would have but the courage to fay to himfelf,—This carelefs life I lead I muft one day answer for; this *injury* I am going to do, this *injuftice*, this *oppreffion*, this *fraud*, this *malicious* ftory, this *ill ufe of my time*, this fquandering away of my eftate; thefe will certainly rife up in judgment againft me:—What an infinite mifchief would this prevent?

And let us not fancy, becaufe God fpare us in this world, that therefore we are fafe. No; for this very reafon we may be affured, that God being juft, there *muft* be an after-reckoning; and his Spirit affures us, *that he referveth finners unto the day of judgment, to be punifhed*.

How thankful then, inftead of repining, fhould Christians be, when they are called to an account in this life for their offences; when they are intreated, or even when they are compelled, to own their faults; and judge *themselves, that they may not be judged of the Lord*.

And let us all remember, that wicked Christians will be judged to the fevereft doom. They know the will of God; they know the terrors of the Lord; they may have all the affiftance to do their duty that their hearts can wifh for; they have the promife of heaven to encourage them; they have the Minifters and the means of grace and falvation with them. How dreadful then muft the judgment of that day be to fuch people!

On the other hand; fuch Christians as do believe, and do endeavour to live under a fenfe of a judgment to come, will have no reafon to dread that day; forasmuch as they may, with the greateft affurance, rely upon the mercy and goodnefs of their Judge. For their Judge himfelf knows what *infirmities* they are fubject to, and what *enemies* and *temptations* they have to ftuggle with; he will therefore accept of a *fincere*, though *imperfect* obedience. We may therefore promife ourfelves, from his word and from his mercy, all the favour our cafe can bear; only let us not hope for his mercy while we continue to offend him wilfully.

In order to this let us often call to mind, that we have fomething to *fear*, and fome-

thing to *hope* for, after death. Let us fet before our eyes the two fentences which Jefus Chrift himfelf has told us<sup>m</sup> fhall be paffed upon *all* men, as their lives fhall require: “Come, ye bleffed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you!” “Go, ye curfed, into everlafting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.”

Whoever can hear thefe fentences without concern, without confidering which of them may be his own portion, muft be given over to a reprobate mind, fo that all further arguments are in vain.

To conclude, therefore, this difcourfe.—You will learn, from what has been faid, how much you ought to value that Gospel, which has made known to us—The myfteries of our redemption; the love of God; the love of Jefus Chrift for his loft creatures; his *incarnation*, his *death*, and the reafons of them both; his *refurrexion*, his *afcenfion*, and his *great power with God*; and laftly, his defign to reward his fervants, and to punifh his enemies.

You cannot be fo infenfible, as to think that thefe things do not concern every foul of us: and yet how often do we repeat thefe articles of our faith, without ever thinking of ordering our lives according to what we believe!

We have great need, therefore, to beg of God, to kindle in our hearts a moft high degree of love for our Redeemer; who for our fakes left the glories of heaven, fulfilled the whole law for us, died for us that we might not die eternally, and who is continually pleading for us at God’s right hand.

In one word; we have the Son of God for our *Brother*, for our *Mafter*, and *Teacher*; for our *example*; for our *facrifice*, to expiate our fins; for our *Saviour*; for our *King*, and *Protector*; for our *Mediator* with God.—What can we defire more?—Yes, O Jefus! this one thing we defire befides; that we may have the grace which Thou only canft procure for us; that we may have the grace to confider thefe things, and to lay them ferioufly to heart; and that our lives may be answerable to our profeflion.

Now to God the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghoft, be afcribed all honour, power, glory, and dominion, now and for ever,

<sup>m</sup> Matth. xxv.



# S E R M O N XXXVI.

## THE CREED PUT INTO PRACTICE.

Vouchsafe, O Jesus, to fill my Heart with thy Holy Spirit; that it may appear in all my Words and Actions, and especially in this Work before me, that I am governed by the Holy Ghost; and may He sanctify this Discourse to the Salvation of all that hear it. Amen.

ACTS ii. 32, 33.

*This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the Right Hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the Promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.\**

I Have, in two former discourses, explained to you the two first parts of the articles of our Creed, and shewed you how they are to be put in practice; because, as without faith it is impossible to please God, so without a suitable practice our Christian name, or Christian faith, will be of little use to us.

I am now come to the last part of our Creed, concerning *the Holy Ghost*, and the following articles, which are of the utmost importance to us.

The occasion of the words now read to you was *this*:—Jesus Christ, just before his ascension into heaven, had told his disciples, that as a sure proof of his being *the Son of God*, and that whatever he had told them was most certain, and that his death was accepted of God as a sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world;—to give them the utmost assurance of *this*, he promised them, that he would send down the Holy Ghost from heaven, to supply his place on earth, to abide with them (that is, with them and their successors) for ever;—that he should lead them into all truth,—bring all things to their remembrance whatever he had taught them;—and that he should convince the world—of the sin of rejecting Christ, and treating him as an impostor,—of the corruption of human nature, and the necessity of a Redeemer,—of the righteous judgment of God upon the impenitent.

This he promised his disciples; and accordingly, ten days after his ascension, when the whole nation of the Jews, and profelytes from all the nations of the world, were met at the great feast in Jerusalem, the Holy Ghost descended in a visible form upon the Apostles, and enabled them in a moment to speak to all those different nations, and to preach to them, to every one in their own language.

This, as it needs must, astonished all that heard them. Upon which, St. Peter takes occasion to inform them, that what they so much wondered at was pursuant to a promise which Christ had made them; and that this was a sure proof, that Jesus Christ, whom they supposed to be no more than a man, and as such had put him to death, *that He was the Son of the Most High God*, as he had often told them; and that God had received him into heaven, and had given him all power in heaven and on earth. And to convince them of this, he had sent down the Holy Ghost in that wonderful manner, who enabled them to do what none but God could do.

He appeals for the truth of the miracle to their own senses; and the argument was so forcible and strong, that *as many as were disposed for eternal life believed*, which were about three thousand, who were converted at that time.

And soon after, most of the nations of the then known world were, by their preaching to them in their several languages, brought out of the darkness of idolatry, into the clear light and true knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ.

And it is upon *this*, that our faith in the Holy Ghost is most firmly founded. We believe in the Holy Ghost, that he is an infinite and an eternal Spirit, *who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified*;—that he is the immediate cause of all holiness in us;—and that it is he who must fit us for heaven and happiness, by his grace and assistance. That therefore we are dedicated to him, together with the Father and the Son, in baptism; and are directed to make it one of our daily prayers, that he may ever be with us.

\* See Luke xi. 13. John xiv. 25, 26. Rom. viii. 16. 1 Cor. xii. 3. Tit. iii. 5.



We believe particularly, that it was He who inspired the holy Apostles, and enabled them to lay the foundation of ONE HOLY CATHOLICK CHURCH, which is the society of all true believers through the world; for that is the meaning of the word *catholick*; (that is, universal;) because the church of Christ is not confined to one people, as was the church of the Jews, but is appointed for the salvation of all nations, and all ages.

We believe, and are assured, that it is the same Holy Ghost who still appointeth the successors of the Apostles, which are the Governors and Pastors of Christ's flock. "Take heed (saith St. Paul) unto yourselves, "and to all the flock over which the Holy "Ghost hath made you overseers."

It is the same Holy Spirit who enables them to preach the Gospel with effect; who impowers them to seal covenants betwixt God and men; to sanctify us, by consecrating us to God, making us members of his church and family, and heirs of the kingdom of heaven.

It is the Holy Ghost who impowers and commands his Ministers, to *reprove, correct*, and to turn out of that society, all such as are a scandal to it, and refuse to be reformed. For this society is, or ought to be, A COMMUNION OF SAINTS; that is, of persons dedicated to God; who are all members of one body, of which Christ is the head; who have all one common faith, one hope of eternal life; who are to pray for, and to assist, and be concerned for, one another as members of one body. This we firmly believe, and ought to act accordingly, as we hope for a share in the blessings promised to this Society. One of which especial blessings we believe to be the FORGIVENESS OF SINS upon our true repentance.

This was what the Apostles were, by the Holy Ghost, commanded to publish, THAT GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD UNTO HIMSELF; that he had appointed *them* and *their* successors to be the ministers of this reconciliation; that he had ordained the Sacrament of Baptism for the remission of sins past; and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, as a standing means to restore such as should afterwards fall into sin, and repent of the same, to restore them to God's favour and pardon.

And we shall be more sensible of the importance and comfort of believing the *forgiveness of sins*, when we consider the next article of our Christian faith, which is THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY: For this is revealed to us by the Holy Ghost, That all men shall rise again with their own bodies, and give an account of their own works. God has expressly said this, and he is able

• Acts xx. 28.

to do it; and therefore it is necessary we should know and firmly believe it: for the consequence of the Resurrection will be AN EVERLASTING LIFE; and *they that have done good*, or have lived good lives, *shall go into life everlasting*; and *they that have done evil*, or have lived bad lives, and have not repented, *shall go into everlasting fire*.

Thus I have given you a short account and explanation of this last part of your Creed; that as in the two former parts I did endeavour to shew you how we might put our *faith into practice*, so I may take this occasion of doing the same in all these articles of the Christian faith just now mentioned.

And believe it, Christians, it is not for nothing that you are so often called upon to repeat these articles of your faith: It is that you may put them in practice, as you hope for salvation; and that you may do so every day of your lives: That, as you BELIEVE IN THE HOLY GHOST, THE LORD AND GIVER OF LIFE, you may, every day of your life, pray for his gracious *assistance*, his *guidance*, and *blessing*: That you may continue true and living members of THE HOLY CATHOLICK CHURCH, which is the appointed means of salvation: That believing the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, you may strive to live as becomes members of so holy a society, or body, which has Jesus Christ for its head and pattern, the Holy Ghost for its guide and comforter, and God the Father for its eternal reward: That believing the FORGIVENESS OF SINS; on one hand, you may never *despair* of mercy; nor, on the other, *presume* on God's mercy and forgiveness, while you continue to live in any known sin: That professing to believe THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY, AND A LIFE EVERLASTING; you may often remember, that you will most certainly come forth out of the grave just as you go in, either *beloved* or *hated* of God to all eternity.

But that we may not pass over these articles, which contain truths of so great importance, too lightly, or as lightly as too often we repeat them, we will now consider, *how they should influence our practice*.

And in the first place let us consider, that we are, every soul of us, subject to be led and governed both by *good* and *evil spirits*. St. Paul expressly tells us, "That there is "an evil spirit which worketh in the children of disobedience." And he reckons up a very numerous host of these enemies of mankind.

Now; Christians, consider what a mercy it is, that from our very infancy we are dedicated to the Holy Ghost, by whom we are put under the protection of the Angels

• Eph. ii. 2.

of



of God, who are appointed to minister unto such as shall be heirs of salvation.

But then let us remember, that this Holy Spirit may be grieved, and provoked to leave us,—to leave us, not only to ourselves, though that would be curse enough,—but to the malice of the Devil, who goes about seeking whom he may be permitted to devour, finding them out of the protection of the Holy Ghost, and the Holy Angels his substitutes.

And this, God knows, is but too often the case, and the reason that so many, who were once the children of God, are now become the children of the Devil; they forgot their baptismal vows; they left off to pray for the fellowship of the Holy Ghost; they added sin to sin, till they provoked God to forsake them; and then they became the slaves of the Devil, and *must* do what he will have them to do, though never so unreasonable, never so wicked.

Let us therefore always remember, that the condition upon which the Holy Ghost will continue to guide and to protect us, is *this*; that we keep the vows we made at our baptism, or that we sincerely repent when we are sensible we have broken them.

When a Christian, therefore, is going to do any thing which he knows to be a sin, he should argue *thus* with himself:—I shall certainly displease the Holy Spirit by this action; if I shall provoke him to leave me, I shall become a slave to Satan, and God knows whether ever I shall be able to get out of his snare.

There is no question to be made, but men are often forced to reason after this manner; the only fault is, they do not heartily beg the aids of the Holy Spirit:—My soul for that man's, who, when assaulted by temptations, turns his eyes inwards, and begs the assistance of the Holy Ghost, if he does not receive grace to help him in time of need.

This is the great happiness of a Christian, that our Body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in us, and consecrated by his presence; he is always in his temple, unless forced by our sins to leave it: What has a Christian then to do, but to apply to him at all times, and on all occasions; to be careful neither to  *speak*, nor to  *think*, nor to  *do*, any thing that may displease him; and, if we chance to do so, immediately to ask pardon? He is always in his temple, and ready to hear us.

Let us therefore ever and anon plead with him, as our necessities shall require. From Thee I beg to receive this grace;—it belongs to Thee, my God, to fortify my soul against this temptation;—give me light to see, and

grace to amend, where I have done amiss;—render me every day more worthy of thy presence, and of thy consolations.

This is the way to *pray without ceasing*. To secure the *presence*, the *assistance*, the *comforts*, of this Holy Spirit, by which we were sealed unto the day of redemption.

Every business, every book we read or hear, every blessing we receive, every turn of Providence, will furnish us with occasions of retiring to the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is within us, either to give him thanks, or to deprecate his judgments, or to acknowledge his glorious attributes, his power, or his wisdom, or his justice, or his goodness.

To proceed:—The meanest Christian has this *privilege*, this *honour*, to have the Holy Ghost for his God, his guide, and *protector*; and the holy Angels for his guard: And it is purely for want of faith and consideration that ever any one Christian despiseth another, or treats him with contempt.

Christians are not sensible of the greatness of this sin, and that makes it so common. It would not be so common, if we would thus reason with ourselves:—This poor man is dear to God, even his poverty makes him the more so; he is a temple of the Holy Ghost; Jesus Christ himself assures me, “That their Angels stand in the presence of God.” And St. James expressly says, “That God hath chosen the poor rich in faith, and heirs of his kingdom.”

When we consider, that it was by the power of the Holy Ghost that the Christian religion, the *only way of salvation*, is established in the world; that it was he who inspired the Holy Writers; that it is for *this reason* that the Bible is called, and is indeed, THE WORD OF GOD; that it is God who speaks to us in this word, and by his Ministers: When we *know*, and *believe*, and *confess* this, What regard shall we have for this word;—how shall we abhor, and avoid, those that profane it, as well as those that would hinder us from reading it;—with what reverence and attention shall we read or hear it;—what entire credit shall we give to every thing declared or commanded in it;—how carefully should we order our lives according to this word;—how assured may we be, that we shall never fall into any dangerous error, while we consult this book, and those pastors whom the Holy Ghost has appointed to lead and to instruct us; and when we sincerely beg the assistance of that Holy Spirit!

And in the last place, since “without *honesty* no man can see the Lord;” and that none but this Holy Spirit can sanctify and make us holy; that it is he alone, who must



change our hearts, and cause that we become as it were NEW CREATURES: This should oblige us to pray continually for his holy fellowship, his guidance and blessing.

It is for this reason, that the church concludes her daily service with this prayer, that "the fellowship" the communication of the gifts and graces "of the Holy Ghost, may be with us evermore."

A man must be a very great stranger to himself, and to his own corrupt nature, who does not see the reason of this, and the absolute necessity of being changed into a new man, before he can be fit for heaven, or capable of eternal happiness;—that he must have a new heart, new desires, a new spirit, and new powers, before ever he can believe, and understand, and love, and do, what God has commanded as necessary to salvation.

Now; it is this Holy Spirit, given at our baptism, and dwelling in us, from whom we have this grace. If we know and believe this sincerely, we shall endeavour never to grieve, never to oppose this Holy Spirit, but suffer him to perfect the good work he hath begun in us, in order to make us holy, that we may be eternally happy.

And never let us say, never let us pretend, never let us fear, that we cannot overcome the corruption of our nature. This Holy Spirit is the almighty power of God; he taketh under his care all such as are consecrated to him in baptism; he is able to convince us of the absolute necessity of caring for our souls; he is able to direct us how to do it effectually; he can enable us to overcome all the difficulties we can possibly meet with, and at last make us acceptable to God, which is the greatest happiness the soul of man can desire.—Only let us not oppose him, let us not force him to forsake us and leave us to ourselves; for then we have no remedy to reclaim or to help us; so that we shall as surely perish as we are sinners, and as such utterly unfit for heaven.

The next article of our Creed is, THE HOLY CATHOLICK CHURCH; that is, I believe and profess myself to be a member of that body of men which has Jesus Christ for its head, and his Word and Spirit for their guide; and which, though dispersed over the world, have one God, one Faith, one Hope; a flock, whose pastors are appointed by the Holy Ghost, and who have the faithful promise of Jesus Christ to be with them until his coming again.

I believe likewise that God, from the beginning, has added to this society "daily such as should be saved," having committed the Word of Reconciliation, and all the means of

grace and salvation, to his Ministers, the pastors and governors of this society.

Well then, how ought the belief and profession of this to affect Christians? Why; every serious Christian will thus reason with himself:—

The church is called *holy*, because the great design of this society is, to make men holy, that they may be happy. For that very end, I was made a member of this church: Most certainly, therefore, if I am not an holy member of this church on earth, I shall be for ever excluded that in heaven, of which this is a part.

If God addeth to this Church such as shall be saved, then if I, for my wicked life, shall deserve to be separated, cut off, or excommunicated, out of any particular church which is a true member of this holy catholic church; then am I, most assuredly, deprived of the ordinary means of grace, and out of the way of salvation.

If the rulers and pastors of this church are indeed appointed by the Holy Ghost, (as St. Paul saith expressly, Acts xx. 28, they are) then, if I shall resist their authority; if I shall despise their godly admonitions; if I shall kick at their reproofs; if I shall make a mock of their persons, and of their doctrine; then do I plainly resist the Holy Ghost, (by whose authority they act) and resist also the counsel and designs of God for my salvation.

If I believe that the Priest, the Minister of God, is appointed by the Holy Ghost to teach, to intercede, and to bless the people in his name; why then I shall reverently attend to his word, highly value his blessing and his prayers, as some of those ways by which God has ordained to give me his blessing and his grace.

If I profess to be a member of this holy Church, then am I bound to make a profession of being such, to join in all holy offices, with all those who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ—both their and our Lord, provided they have nothing in their worship contrary to faith and piety. And I am not to judge of this too rashly, lest, by separating myself without cause from a sound part of the catholic church, I separate myself from Jesus Christ, who is the head of that church, out of which there is no salvation, as none were saved from perishing but those who were in the ark with Noah.

And may God grant that we may all truly understand, and value, the glorious privilege of being members of this church, and that we may become holy in its communion, as he who has called us is holy.

In the next place, there is to be in this church a COMMUNION OF SAINTS, that is, of Christians; for in the church of Christ,

Z z

Saints



Saints and Christians signify the same thing; all Christians *being called to holiness*.

A communion (that is, there ought to be a communication, a good understanding, a fellow-feeling) amongst Christians, as there is amongst the members of the same body, in which every member contributes towards the ease, welfare, and safety of the whole.

In this communion, Christians are obliged to love and to bear with one another; to have compassion one for another; to pray for, and to help one another; not considering ourselves as in a private capacity; but as people united to Christ and his church, and intrusted, every one, with talents, whether of wisdom, or authority, or power, or riches, for the use of the whole body.

A Christian, who considers himself in *this capacity*, will reason thus with himself: I have nothing but what I have from the bounty of God; I cannot pretend to be more a favourite of heaven, than he that wants what I have; why then have I more than is sufficient for my own necessities? The answer is plain, *that I may give to him that needeth*; and if I do not, I am unjust.—So that in truth, all the advantage that a rich Christian has above a poor Christian is *this*; that he has enough to live comfortably himself, and has it in his power to make such as want live comfortably too.

God has given another man *authority*,—not for his own sake sure! No; but that by doing justice, preserving peace, discountenancing vice and impiety, promoting of virtue, he may make the whole community easy and happy, and be a means of preserving it in the favour of God.

If I have more *learning and knowledge* than many others, let me not grow proud however; for I shall certainly answer for it, as for a talent committed to my trust, and dearly pay for it, if I do not endeavour to instruct the ignorant, and guide those that are out of the way.

They that have *time* to spare, and are freed by the circumstances of their condition from bodily labour, are apt to think themselves very happy; and so they would be, if they would spend *that time*, either in works of mercy or charity, for the good of others.

For, in truth, every Christian owes something to the communion of which he is a member:—The rich owe to the poor a part of their substance; the poor owe to them their prayers; the ignorant stand obliged to those that instruct them; and these again stand obliged to somebody for their leisure to get wisdom.

And the Apostle's conclusion will ever be found true, though little minded, "That if one member suffer, all the members"

(though not always perceived) "will suffer with it." And he who is not concerned for the good or evil which happens to others, is no better than a dead member of the body of Christ, and knows nothing of that communion which ought to be amongst Christians.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS is the next article of our Christian faith; and it is an article of the greatest comfort; for all having sinned, and all being subject to sin, and on that account liable to the displeasure of God, what a mercy is it we have a remedy at hand, by which we may be sure of pardon upon most reasonable terms. And this we have Jesus Christ's own word for; commanding, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached unto all nations in his name;" that is, *Repentance* on man's part, and *forgiveness of sins* on the part of God. IN HIS NAME; that is, this favour is granted for his sake, and for the sake of what he has done and suffered for us; always remembering, that he died for us, not to save us without repentance on our part, but to prevail with God to accept of our repentance.

A Christian therefore, when he reflects upon this article of his Creed, should argue thus with himself:—This great *goodness of God* ought, in all reason, *to lead me to repentance*. If repentance *must* go before pardon, why do I delay it one moment? If repentance is the gift of God, why do I not ask it? What if I should provoke God by this contempt of his mercy, to leave me to myself? I will therefore beg of God to give me that repentance to which he has promised mercy and pardon; I will not be afraid to see the charge that is against me, because I have the word of my Saviour for it, "that all sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men;" except that one against the Holy Ghost, which no man has committed who sues to God for pardon, which he could not do, but by the assistance of that Holy Spirit.

And if my sins are such as give me great disturbance of mind, I will not only confess them to God, but I will apply to some one of those pastors whom God has appointed to be the Ministers of reconciliation betwixt God and man: To him I will open my case and my grief; I will take his ghostly counsel and directions; and, when *he* judges my repentance to be sincere, according to the rules of the Gospel, I will beg of *him* to give me absolution; for sure, sure those words of Jesus Christ were not so often repeated to no purpose, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." I will therefore faithfully believe, that it will be unto me according to this word.

And because I must not expect forgiveness of God, without a forgiving temper in myself, it shall be my constant prayer and endeavour



endeavour to comply with a condition so very reasonable; and yet too hard for flesh and blood, without the grace of God.

And lastly, I will not forget the words of my Saviour, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee;" lest, by sinning and repenting, and repenting and sinning so often, I provoke God at last to deny me the grace of repentance; I will rather consider my *weakness* and *backslidings*, and be more importunate for grace for the time to come.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY is the next article of our Creed. "The hour is coming, (saith our Lord<sup>a</sup>) in the which all that are in the graves shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

Oh, Christians! what an amazing truth is this, to such as are not careful to keep their bodies in *temperance*, *soberness*, and *chastity*! What a prodigious difference will this hour make betwixt good and bad livers!

Will any man, in his right mind, persuade himself, that this body which he now defiles with whoredom, or debauches with continual drunkenness, or pampers with luxury, that such a body shall rise again to be happy? O, no: such a person can have no hopes—(miserable hopes, indeed!)—no hopes, but that God, and his Word, and their Creed, may not be true.

A Christian will rather reason thus with himself:—What will it profit me to enjoy the short pleasures of this life, if the end shall be damnation? I will rather follow the example of an Apostle, "Keep under my body, lest I be a cast-away." As I hope for God's favour, I will endeavour to glorify him both in my body and my spirit, which are both his. And whereinsoever I have dishonoured him by any of my members, I will strive to make some amends. If my *eyes* have transgressed, I will now make a covenant with them; I will bless God with my *tongue*; I will refrain my feet from every evil way; I will open my hand to the poor and needy; and I will not make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.

This is to live by faith. And he who repeats this Creed, and will not be persuaded to do so, the belief of a resurrection will be a plague and a torment to him as long as he lives.

The concluding article of our Creed is, the belief of a *LIFE EVERLASTING*: a life that is to last for ever, either in endless torments, or in endless happiness, both of body and soul. Let us consider this as we ought

<sup>a</sup> John v. 28.

to do: for now is the time in which we are to chuse *where* and *what* we are to be to all eternity. There is therefore no time to be lost to make this choice: "The night cometh (saith our Lord) when no man can work;" no more can be done by ourselves, or by others for us; it will then be too late to *repent*, to *resolve*, to *promise*, to *wish*, or to *do* any thing.

Let us, therefore, every soul of us, while we have time, have our eye and our thoughts upon eternity. This will wonderfully influence all our actions.

What signifies it, a Christian will say to himself, what my portion is in this world, since I am so soon to leave it, and am going to an everlasting life? All the riches I treasure up here will stand me in no stead when I come to die; I will therefore endeavour to lay up *my treasure in heaven*, where I hope to be for ever. Why should I be apprehensive of the evils of this life, or complain too much under them, when I verily believe and hope for a better and an eternal life, and that these very afflictions are designed by a merciful God to make me more fit for that life? I will often remember, *that the wages of sin is death*, eternal death, if not repented of; I will therefore make no tarrying to turn unto the Lord, and make my peace with him by a true repentance. I am convinced, *that without holiness no man shall see the Lord in peace*; I will therefore, from this moment, endeavour to be as holy as, by God's grace, I can be, that I may be happy for ever.

Thus, good Christians, I have gone through all the articles of your *Creed*, or Christian faith. You see the reason why we are required to repeat them so often; it is, that we may live like people who profess to believe such important truths.

Few Christians, it is true, deny their Creed; but too many live as if there were nothing in it which they need hope or fear.

What will this indifference end in? These things are true, and will be found so whether we mind them or not. And if a man perish eternally, what signifies it whether he perishes as a Christian or an infidel? Let us, therefore, not think ourselves one jot the safer, because we are Christians, unless our lives be answerable.

As for those who hate, and do not care to repeat the Creed; the reason of this is plain; it puts them in mind of an almighty and just God, whose laws they have broken, and resolve to break them again; who sees all their ways; whose mercy in sending his own Son to save them, they have despised; and who has appointed a day in which he will judge them in righteousness: Because the very sight of it upbraids them with the highest



highest ingratitude, in despising the love of God in this dispensation, and all the means of grace and salvation, which he has ordained. Lastly; because it puts them in mind of a life everlasting, which they are not willing to prepare for; and of eternal death and torments, which they have too much reason to fear.

But happy are they who think much of these truths; and who, by doing so, come to be fully persuaded of them, and close with them, and are thankful to God who has made himself and these things known to us, and who has done so much for us, in order to make us eternally happy.

And be assured of it, good Christians, that a time is coming, (that is, when we come to die) that we shall see the importance of a true faith; when we shall set a true value upon Jesus Christ, and what he has done for us; when no earthly thing can help or comfort us, but a firm faith in his merits. But then, let us consider, that we can have no assurance of this, but by living as if we did indeed believe the truths we profess to believe. Let us therefore put these questions,

every one to himself, and have a direct answer from our own heart:—

Is my life answerable to my faith? Does my faith purify my heart? Does it produce obedience to the commands of God? Does it make me sensible of my sin and misery? Does it make me seek for in earnest, and value, a Redeemer? Do I find myself governed by the Holy Spirit of God? Do I labour to secure the forgiveness of my sins by a true repentance and amendment, where I have done amiss? Do these amazing truths, —*Everlasting Life* and *Everlasting Misery*,—awaken in me a concern answerable to what I am to gain or lose?

I may then judge, whether my faith is saving, or whether it is only the faith of hypocrites. If the latter, these articles of our Creed will only be so many articles of our condemnation.

From which judgment and condemnation, may God deliver us all, for the Lord Jesus' sake. To whom be dominion and power, both now and for ever. *Amen.*

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, &c.

## S E R M O N XXXVII.

### THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMAND; OR, THE LOVE OF GOD.

AMANTISSIME Deus, fons omnis gratiæ, accende in me, per spiritum tuum, purissimam amoris tui flammam, ut super omnia te diligam; largire ut hoc amore impletus, e vivâ experientiâ alios doceam, ut et ego ipse, et qui me audiunt, in tui imaginem magis, magisque transformemur; propter perfectum amorem Redemptoris nostri. *Amen.*

MARK xii. 32, 33, 34.

*And the Scribe said unto Jesus, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.*

**I** MAKE choice of these words, as being the same in effect which our Lord has elsewhere affirmed to be the sum and substance of the Law and the Prophets. That is, these *are* what all God's Revelations to mankind are designed to explain and enforce.

But then I rather choose these words, as spoken by a *Jew*, to shew, that the Jewish and Christian Religions do both aim at the very same thing; and that such as were truly spiritual, in all ages, knew very well,

that all Outward Institutions, from the beginning, were only in order to promote *the Love of God*, and of *our Neighbour*, amongst men.

For this is the meaning of the Scribe's saying, *that to love God with all the heart, and one's neighbour as himself, is more than whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices*; that is, the love of God, and of our neighbour, is a more indispensable duty than all the sacrifices in the world. Not as if sacrifices could have

\* See Pl. xcvi. 10. John xiv. 21, 23. Eph. iii. 17, 18. 1 John iv. 19. v. 3.



been neglected, having been appointed from the beginning, and without which there was no remission of sins; but we are hence to learn, that the end of all religion is to *create*, or to *preserve*, the Love of God, and of our neighbour, amongst men.

St. Paul uses a way of speaking very like this, when he saith, *Circumcision is nothing*; that is, it will not render a man more acceptable to God, unless it obligeth him to love God, and to keep his commandments.

St. Paul would not have us to conclude, from these words, that a Jew under the Law might at his pleasure have neglected to circumcise his children; for this was, by God's appointment, a visible sign by which his church and people were distinguished from all others, and by *that Sacrament* sanctified to himself. It was a seal of the covenant that God made with Abraham and his seed, that he would be *their* God, and that they should neither have, nor love, any other God besides him. Circumcision, therefore, was nothing; that is, it would not avail any of the seed of Abraham to have been circumcised, unless he bound himself, by that ordinance, to love the Lord with all his heart.

St. Peter saith, in effect, the same of Baptism: "Baptism (saith he) doth now save us," or becomes a means of salvation; "not the putting away of the filth of the flesh," not as it is an outward visible sign, "but (as it supposes) a good conscience enquiring of God," to know and to love him; or as it obliges all who are baptized to live according to the will of that God to whom they are dedicated in baptism.

Lastly; St. Paul saith of preaching, "Neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth;" that is, in comparison of *God that giveth the increase*. Not that *preaching* and *hearing* are, under the Gospel, indifferent things, which men may value or despise at their pleasure; the Spirit assuring us to the contrary,—That such as will not hear cannot believe, and consequently *cannot be saved*. But *this* is what we are to learn from these words of the text, and from such like expressions in Holy Scripture; namely, that the end and design of all Outward Ordinances in Religion *are*, and ever *were*, to bring men to the knowledge and love of God, and of their neighbour; and that as, on one hand, Outward Institutions are not, *at our peril*, to be neglected or despised,—for that would be to despise the means of grace, or the merciful provision which God has ordained to make us happy; neither, on the other hand, are they to be depended on as sufficient to salvation, unless they lead us to the love of God, and of our neighbour.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. ix. 22.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 21.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 19.

<sup>d</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 7.

"Thou art not far" (saith Jesus Christ) "from the kingdom of heaven;" that is, thou hast a right apprehension of the meaning and design of all religious duties, and you are in a fair way of becoming a Christian; for you confess that the love of God, and of your neighbour, is the end of all religion; and the Christian religion, of all others, will soonest lead you to the love of God, and of your neighbour. *You are not therefore far from the kingdom of heaven.* For when you come to be a Christian, you will have the same opinion of the Outward Duties of Christianity, as you *now* have of the *Jewish Sacrifices*; you will not depend upon them any farther than as they are means of obtaining a divine nature, of uniting the soul to God; or as they are expressions of that love which men owe to God, and to their neighbour.

You will say, for instance, that to love God with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul and strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, (that is, to deal with him with justice and charity) is more than *alms*, than *fasting*, than *prayers*, or than any *Outward Duties of Christianity*. Not that you will dare to omit or slight *these*, since they are appointed by God for attaining that love which *of all things* is most acceptable to him. But then you will not *rest* in *these*, as if they were any farther well-pleasing to God, than as they are the most proper methods of restoring us to the image of God, in which we were at first created; that is, in leading us the very shortest way to the *Love of God and of our Neighbour*, which, as was said before, is the very end and design of the Christian religion, as you acknowledge it was of the Jewish; for you say with *truth and discretion*, "That to love the Lord God with all the heart and soul, and one's neighbour as himself, is more than whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices."

And this is the reason why these are by our Lord called *the Two Great Commands*: Namely; because all the rest of God's commands were given in order to create and preserve the love of God, and of our neighbour.

The *First Command* (for instance) forbids us to place our happiness, our dependance, any where but on God; for if we once believe that any thing can make us more happy than he that made us, we cannot but love that thing better than God.

For this reason the Scriptures call a covetous man *an idolater*, because such a man looks upon riches as sufficient to procure him the greatest comfort; he desires them, he depends upon them, he loves them, above all things.

The Holy Scriptures say the same of the *glutton*, that he makes *his belly his God*; that



is, he thinks of it, he loves it with all his heart.

That our minds, therefore, may not be carried away from God, this command obliges us to look upon him as the author of all the good that ever we *had*, or *can* enjoy; and the more persuaded any man is of *this*, the more he must love God.

For this very reason, every faithful Christian loves the Lord Jesus Christ with all his heart and soul; being persuaded that Jesus Christ has redeemed him from the greatest misery, and purchased for him the greatest good; that therefore he must love Him as his *Lord and God*, who, by redeeming us, has made us capable of eternal happiness, which by nature we have no pretence to.—Well therefore might the Apostle say, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema;” let him be cut off from all hopes of mercy; which he would not have said, and have taught us to have robbed God of his honour, but that he knew very well that none but God could redeem us: For if the most excellent creature that God has made could have redeemed us, we should have been bound to have loved that creature with all the powers of our souls; that is, *equal with God*, which would be abominable idolatry.

But to proceed:—The *Second Command* forbids the making of any image to represent God, lest men should entertain mean thoughts of God, and imagine that he is like any thing in nature, and so love him less than he ought to be loved.

The *Third Command* aims at the same thing;—to *preserve*, and to *increase*, the *respect due to God*. For we are forbidden even to *speak of God* but after the most serious and worthy manner; that both we ourselves, and all that hear us, may be led to *love and reverence* that great and glorious name—*The Lord of Hosts*. And lest people should think nothing of *words*, which are forgotten as soon almost as spoken, God declares, that he will certainly punish such sinners who speak lightly of him, as if he were an idol, which did not hear, or could not punish, those that speak of him with contempt; who do not respect him themselves, and who teach others not to love him.

Lastly; the *Fourth Command* aims at the same thing;—to *secure*, and to *promote*, the *Love of God in the world*. For God has separated one day in every week, and bound all, that own him for their God, *to keep it holy*,—not to do their worldly business on *that day*; but to remember that God is their *Creator and Redeemer*, to adore him as such, to hear his holy word, to exhort and to provoke others to love and to good works.

Thus you see, that the First Table of the Law—its great design is, to promote the love of God amongst men. And for the Second Table, the Apostle saith expressly, “That love is the fulfilling of the Law,” relating to our neighbour. For these commandments of the Second Table,—“Thou shalt not commit adultery;—Thou shalt not kill;—Thou shalt not steal;—Thou shalt not bear false witness;—Thou shalt not covet;”—all aim at this; to oblige us to *love our neighbour as ourselves*, by forbidding us to do him any hurt, and obliging us to do him good when it is in our power.

In short; the *Love of God* and of *our Neighbour* was the end of the Law. Such as had any right apprehensions of religion (you see) understood it so; while such as were carnal perverted the design of the Law, and the very Law itself. They looked upon Circumcision, and Sacrifices, and other ordinances of the Law, as things *in themselves* acceptable to God, and as sufficient expressions of *their Love to God*: They acknowledged it their duty to love their neighbour; but then they called nobody their neighbour but those of their own race and faith.

Our Lord Christ has given us a better notion of Charity,—of the love we owe to God, and to our neighbour; that is, he has given us the true spiritual meaning of the Law, and the design of all true religion:—And this is what by the blessing of God I am going to explain to you, by shewing you, *First*, What is meant by the Love of God. *Secondly*, How it must be obtained. *Thirdly*, What will be the certain effects and fruits of loving God with all our hearts.

After which we will consider the other branch of Charity, *the Love we owe to our Neighbour*.

I. We will first enquire *What is meant by the command of loving God with all our hearts*.

Now, Love is a natural passion. If we see any thing which we think worthy of our love, we are immediately fond of it, we are unwilling to part with it, we are very uneasy when we are forced to it. In short, our hearts are united to it, and our happiness depends upon it. We had need therefore to be very careful, that what we set our hearts upon be in truth worthy of our love, or else we are sure to be miserable at the last. And this is the true reason why *the Love of God* is made our *first and great duty*, because *God only can make us happy*.

We may fancy that *pleasures*, or *riches*, or *honours*, or a thousand things besides, would make us happy, if we had them; but the experience of all the world may convince



us, that all these *are vanity, and vexation of spirit*: The pleasure they afford cannot last always; but a too great fondness for them will always be followed by fearful apprehensions of a future account, and a comfortless end, if not bitterly repented of.

Well then, since we are but too apt to love where we should not,—to love what will but make us miserable; our merciful God has been pleased to direct us where to place our *first Love*, even upon God himself, which no man ever repented of. For being infinitely worthy of our love, both as he is the fountain of all goodness, and as he is good to every particular man, whoever considers this attentively cannot but love him. It is for this reason that St. John saith, “He that loveth not, knoweth not God;” intimating, that the love of God is the necessary effect of the knowledge of God.

Men fancy that they know what God is, though they have never seriously considered in what he excels all other beings; and so their *love*, like their *knowledge*, is very scant and unworthy of God.

They do not consider, that *God is everlasting*; and that nothing is so that we are apt to doat on.

They do not consider, that *God is almighty*, and that he can do abundantly more for us than we can ask or think.

They do not consider his *infinite goodness*, of which every creature in heaven and on earth is a sharer.

They do not consider the favours they have received from God, the happiness he has promised them, nor the blessings they hope for.

In short; if men do not love God, it is because they do not *know* him, they do not *think* of him.

But what is it to love him with all our heart and soul? Why; it is to have the highest esteem for him; it is to love him above all other things. It is to love nothing that we know he does *not* love; it is to delight in knowing his pleasure, and to be pleased with what we know will please him; it is to think ourselves happy in having his *word* for our guide, his *providence* for our security, his *goodness* for our dependance; it is to be jealous of his honour, to pray that his kingdom and authority may be established in the earth, and that his name may every where be adored; it is to suffer any thing for his sake, rather than displease him; it is to be, *with pleasure*, whatever he would have us be.

Gracious God! if this were our case, how happy should we be! How easy would love make his yoke! We should obey him with

pleasure; and we should despise all the little baits, which every now and then would draw our hearts from God. We should run with patience the race that is set before us, being assured of his care now, and of his favour hereafter. The changes and chances of this mortal life would not affright us, when the Governor of the world is our protector. All the duties of religion, instead of being a burthen, would be our delight. We should delight to lay all our wants before him whom we love; we should deny ourselves without pain, when we know we please our God by doing so. Nay, Repentance itself, *that bitter duty*, would become a pleasure, when it would have this certain effect, to make us love God more passionately, who is so good as to forgive us our trespasses. Lastly; how easily should we, on all occasions, know the will of God, being assured of this by our Lord himself:—*He that desires to do the will of God, shall know the doctrine whether it be of God.*

II. You see, good Christians, what it is to love God, and the happiness of such a state. You cannot but think it a very desirable grace, and such as every body should strive to be possessed of. And this, in the second place, is what I would propose to your consideration, namely, *How we may possess our hearts with the Love of God.*

Now; as the end of all true religion, *from the beginning*, was to plant the love of God in the world; so it is the peculiar excellency of the Christian religion, where it is in good earnest embraced, to do this most effectually. For the Christian religion gives us the most *worthy thoughts of God*; that he is great and good *in himself*, and that he is *good to us*. For even when we were enemies unto him, *he loved us*; proposing terms of pardon, and patiently bearing with our neglect of them. For he sent from heaven his beloved Son, with full power to establish an everlasting righteousness amongst men; not such a righteousness as the Jewish nation contended for, which consisted in Outward Ordinances, but such as is proper to make us *partakers of the Divine Nature*.

What a wonderful instance and discovery of divine love have we in the Gospel!—God united to our nature, setting us an example how we ought to walk so as to please God; teaching us *humility, self-denial*, and *submission* to the will of God, as the only graces which can procure his favour here, and eternal happiness hereafter.

Here (that is, *in the Gospel*) we have a full and free pardon of all our sins, upon the most reasonable conditions; here we are assured that a sincere endeavour to please God will be accepted, instead of a perfect obedience;



ence; here we have liberty and authority to call God our Father, and encouragement to go to him upon all occasions.' In short, the Gospel (as St. Paul, Rom. viii. 2, calls it) *is the Law of the Spirit of Life*; that is, it does not only teach us a set of principles and outward ordinances, but it is such a dispensation as will frame the heart to the love of God; obliging to true and substantial holiness, and enabling us to prosecute it, by giving us all the encouragement and assistance we shall ask and stand in need of.

And though no religion ever *was*, or *can* be, without *outward ordinances*, yet in the Christian dispensation, all these aim at establishing the *Love of God* in the hearts of Christians. We are dedicated to God *in baptism*, that the Spirit and Love of God may take possession of our hearts, before the world bewitches us. We are often called upon to *receive the Lord's Supper*, that the love of God and of Christ, *in our redemption*, may not be forgotten in the midst of distracting business. We do not look upon or use these *as charms* that will benefit us without an holy life; but we look upon them as means appointed by God, for creating and preserving his love in our hearts.

We have the same opinion of all other duties. If a Christian renounces the world, it is because the Spirit of God has told him, "That if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." If a Christian *fasts*, or *prays*, or *denies himself*, it is not that he thinks these things in themselves well-pleasing to God, but only so far as they help to prepare our souls for the love of God, which of all things is the most acceptable to God. If a Christian submits to the Ministers of Christ's kingdom, though they are men of like passions with himself, yet it is because the Gospel assures him, that they are Ministers of God for his good, if he obeys them as such; that God is by them reconciling men to himself; that they have the power of binding and loosing; and that Christ has promised to be with them unto the world's end.

In one word; the Christian religion is most proper to make us humble, by convincing us of our own *weakness, inconstancy, backsliding, ignorance, and proneness to all wickedness*.

When it has done this, it encourages us to look up to God in Jesus Christ; to depend upon his love and goodness for light to *know*, for a will to *choose*, and for power to *do*, the will of God. It bids us do what is in our own power, and that God, *seeing our sincerity*, will still supply us with more grace, till we come to love him as we should do,

\* 1 John ii. 15.

*with all our heart, and soul, and strength*; which, as has often been said before, *is the end of the Christian religion, and of all its ordinances*.

III. *The fruits and effects of which will be very visible in the lives of all those who have the love of God shed abroad in their hearts.*—For where the love of God is the ruling principle of a Christian's life, there will follow,—

*First*; A chearful submission to God's will in all outward dispensations of his providence, believing that his infinite wisdom and goodness always orders what is best for his creatures, whether it be for correction or instruction.

*2dly*; An entire obedience to his commands; as knowing, *that this is the love of God*,—thus it will express itself,—*that we keep his commandments*.

*3dly*; This will be followed by an hearty concern to know the will of God, that we may not displease him whom we love, by doing what he would not have done.

*4thly*; There will be a careful use of the means of grace which God has appointed; for though the love of God is "more than whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices," yet these being helps to the love of God, a Christian dare not neglect even the outward ordinances, at the peril of his soul.

*5thly*; We shall be very jealous of the honour of God, and abhor all such *principles, company, or conversation*, as any way tend to lessen his esteem amongst men.

*6thly*; We shall love and value all that is good in any of his creatures, knowing that so much is the image of God in them.

*7thly*; We shall be well pleased when things go as God would have them; that is, when piety, and justice, and peace, and charity, are encouraged and prosper.

*8thly*; We shall be every day less and less fond of, and concerned for, the world, till at last we think nothing too valuable to be parted with for his sake whom we love so entirely.

*9thly*; We shall be chearful under all outward afflictions, faithfully believing, that the Lord preserveth them that love him.

And *lastly*; We shall serve him with the love of children, not of *servants or slaves*, who look upon the duties of Christianity, as they do upon the *rents and services* which they owe to their temporal Lords; they do them with pain and reluctance; they sometimes shift them off, and in their hearts wish they were free from them; while a true lover of God serves him with pleasure, and takes delight in approaching him.

And



And are these the marks, are these the fruits and effects, of a sincere love of God?

What reason then have we all to blush, and be extremely concerned, to find so few of these instances of the love of God in our hearts and lives!

What reason have we all to beg of God, that for the time to come we may more faithfully observe *this First and Great Command*,—that we may not think it sufficient to say, that we love the Lord our God with all our hearts, when we love a thousand things better;—that we may not satisfy ourselves in the bare outward duties of religion, without letting the love of God appear in our lives and conversations!

What reason have we to be very watchful over the corrupt inclinations of our hearts, which, if not well looked to, will always lead us to an excessive love and fondness

for the world; which will effectually hinder us from loving God with all our hearts!

And, forasmuch as God has made the love of himself, and of our neighbour, inseparable, how very much concerned should all Christians be, to have *this* mark of their love to God; that is, a tender compassion for the whole creation.

In one word, since there are no hopes of happiness but *to those that love God sincerely*; since all the evils the world complains of are owing to the want of this divine charity; lastly, since our very prayers and religion will be a burthen and a sin, while the love of God does not possess our hearts, let us make this our constant prayer to God,—That he would pour into our hearts such love towards him, that we, loving him above all things, may obtain his gracious promises, and be made partakers of his heavenly treasure, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.

## S E R M O N XXXVIII.

THE SECOND GREAT COMMAND; OR, THOU SHALT LOVE THY NEIGHBOUR AS THYSELF.

Amantissime Jesu! Consummatissimum Charitatis Exemplar! Largire mihi Gratiā Charitatis erga proximum, ex gustu Misericordiæ Divinæ promanantem; ut omnes omnino homines amans, inimicis ignoscens, pro illis orans, et illos amore vincens, alijs ostendere valeam Charitatis viam, fructus et felicitatem; et quanti apud Deum sit momenti; perfectum amorem tuum propter Redemptor suavissime. Amen.

MARK xii. 32, 33, 34.

*And the Scribe said unto Jesus, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God.\**

I Have already told you, good Christians, in a former discourse, that I made choice of these words, as spoken by a Jew, and approved by our Lord, to shew you, in the first place, that such as were truly spiritual in all ages, and under all dispensations, knew very well, that all Outward Institutions were in order to *secure*, or to *promote*, or to *create*, the knowledge and love of God, and of our neighbour in the world. For this is the meaning of the scribe's saying, that to love God with all the heart, and with all the soul, is more than whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices; not as if sacrifices could have been neglected, having been ordained by God, to represent and typify the death of Christ; and

without which (as the Apostle tells us<sup>b</sup>) "there was no remission of sins."

I observed, that St. Paul saith the same in effect of circumcision, "that it is nothing;" and of preaching, "that he that planteth is "nothing;" And that St. Peter saith of baptism, that it is not the outward ordinance that saveth us, but as it supposeth a good conscience enquiring of God to know and to love him.

Now; from these, and such-like Sacred Scriptures, we learn, that the end and design of all outward ordinances *are*, and *ever were*, to bring men to the knowledge and love of God and of our neighbour; and that

\* See John xiii. 35. Gal. v. 14. 1 Tim. i. 5. 1 Pet. iv. 8. 1 John iv. 21.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. ix. 22.



as, on one hand, outward ordinances are not, *at our peril*, to be despised or neglected; neither, on the other hand, are they to be depended on as sufficient unto salvation, unless they lead us to the love of God and of our neighbour; which by our Lord are called THE TWO GREAT COMMANDS; because all other commands and ordinances, whether of the Law or Gospel, were intended to promote and secure *these two*; and because too, all others might be dispensed with, if God should think fit. But the love of God and of our neighbour never were, *nor ever will be*, dispensed with.

I have already shewn you, that the *four first* of the ten commandments aim solely at this, to *establish* and to *secure* the love of God in the world. By forbidding any other being to be worshipped or depended on;—by forbidding men to worship God by an image, lest they should come to have mean thoughts of God, supposing him to be like any thing that can be represented by an image;—by forbidding men even to use the name of God, but after a serious manner;—and lastly, by obliging us to set one day in seven apart, to be employed in searching after the knowledge of God, in worshipping him, and asking his blessing, *that we may love him more perfectly*.

After this I explained three things: What we are to understand by loving God with all our hearts;—how such a love is to be obtained;—and lastly, what are the natural *effects, fruits, and signs*, of the love of God dwelling in our hearts.

I now come to set before you *the second branch of Charity, the second Great Command*, (as our Saviour calls it) that is, *to love our neighbour as ourselves*; which if we do sincerely, the Apostle assures us, “we fulfil “the whole law” relating to our neighbour. So that it concerns us, above all things, to understand a law on which so much depends.

I will therefore endeavour to shew you, *First*, The meaning of this command. *Secondly*, The obligations we lie under to receive, and to obey it. *Thirdly*, I will set before you such instances and expressions of this love to our neighbour as are every where dispersed through the word of God. And lastly, because these, very many of them, are very hard to flesh and blood, we will consider what helps God has afforded and directed us to, in order to enable us to do our duty in this particular.

I. We will first consider THE MEANING OF THIS COMMAND. Love or Charity, then, is such a temper as disposeth a man to *wish well*, and *do well*, to others; it is an hearty good-will to mankind, proceeding from a love for God, whose creatures we all are,

\* Rom. xiii. 8, 9.

and all, more or less, partakers of his image; it is moreover a *grace* or *gift* of God, which he bestows where he sees men desirous of and disposed for such a favour: For such a disposition to good is not naturally in any man; *the heart being* (as the Prophet speaks) *desperately wicked*, and, without the grace of God, would devise mischief instead of good. It is true, men may have their *favourites*; may wish well to their *friends*; may shew kindnesses for very ill ends; but this is not the love which God inspires, or which he will ever reward. *That* must proceed from himself; and he bestows it on *those* only who love him sincerely, and sincerely desire to please him.

But *who is our neighbour*, whom we are commanded to love? Why, Jesus Christ has taught us in the Gospel, that every man is our neighbour and our brother, though never so mean, though never so different in manners, in opinion, or complexion; for we are all of one blood, all redeemed by Jesus Christ, and all capable of the same happiness. And as long as God thinks any man worthy to live, we are bound to treat him as our neighbour; that is, with love and kindness, *for life is more than meat, and the body than raiment*. If God vouchsafe the one, we ought not to withhold the other. But our Lord has put this out of all doubt, by commanding us *to love even our very enemies*: for if any body might have been excluded from our charity, our enemies most surely would have been of that number.

But how are we to love our Neighbour? The command saith, *as we love ourselves*.—Now; there is a vicious *self-love*, which is the fountain of all iniquity and injustice, and the very destruction of Christian charity. There is also a *hellish love*, when men, out of affection as they call it, desire to make others as wicked as themselves; who do indeed strive to *please their neighbour*, not *for his good*, and *to edification*, as the Apostle directs, *but to his destruction*.

Now; neither the one nor the other of these is a Christian rule, to direct him what sort of love he should *bear* and *exercise* towards his neighbour; but this is the meaning of the command, *Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself*; that is, *as men, fearing God, do love themselves*. None but such receive it as a command; and to such only it is a direction how they ought to love their neighbour: for in truth, men naturally love themselves better than their neighbour; and it is faith alone can change their sentiments: It is that which tells them, that they are made for eternity; and so is their neighbour;—that God is our common Father, and all we are brethren;—that those

who



who do not love as brethren here, cannot possibly be happy hereafter;—that this life is short, and has nothing in it to compare to the happiness of the next;—and that nothing can recommend us more effectually to the love and favour of God, than a tender regard for our neighbour; and that it is for this reason he commands us to love him *as ourselves*; that is, *sincerely*, as in the sight of God.

It is an appeal to the consciences of men, who know very well how they love themselves; what satisfaction they take in their *own* welfare; how heartily they lament their *own* misfortunes; how solicitous to supply their *own* wants; how careful to hide their *own* defects and faults; how jealous of their *own* reputation; how ready to find excuses for their *own* weaknesses and oversights; and how apt to pardon *themselves* when they have done amiss.

Now any man, who lives in the fear of God, knows very well whether his heart stands thus affected towards his neighbour; if not, he is *self-condemned*, and cannot expect to be justified before God, if he believes that God has made the sincere love we bear to ourselves, a *rule* of the love we should shew to others.

Thus much for the *sincerity* of our love. But then, for the *manner* of expressing this love, we are to consider, how God has commanded us to *shew* our love; how God himself *treats* those he loves. We know, that God has appointed *magistrates* to punish evil doers; that he has commanded *his Ministers* to rebuke the disobedient, and to cast out of his church such as shall obstinately refuse to obey his laws; we know with what severity he himself deals with sinners; but then this is because he loves them, and because he would love them eternally: He therefore bears with them, and when he punishes them, he does it with regret; he *pities* them, he gladly receives them when they return to their duty, and forgets all their past offences: And so do all his faithful servants,—who know very well that wicked men do neither love God nor their neighbour, and that if they are not reclaimed in time, they are certainly undone for ever: And therefore it is God's express command, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother; thou shalt not suffer sin upon him," for that is indeed to hate him.—Thus much for the *meaning* of these words.

II. We shall now consider them as an *express*, as an *indispensable Command of God*,—as a law by which we shall be *judged* at the last day; and therefore it behoves us to obey it at our utmost peril.

<sup>a</sup> Lev. xix. 17.

We are not to question its *reasonableness*; for God cannot command what is otherwise. We are not to say it is hard to be understood; for then the greatest part of men could not know what they are bound to. We are not to say it is impossible to be obeyed; for God has not given a law to his creatures, which he would not enable them to obey, if they are not wanting to themselves: So that obeyed it must be at the peril of our souls.

It is not a *counsel*, but a *command*. St. James calls it a *Royal Law*; St. John calls it the *Law of God*; and our Lord calls it *His Law*, by way of excellency.

What is all this for, but to make the strongest impressions upon our souls; and that we may strive with all our might to understand and obey it in the whole course of our lives? For no love is acceptable to God, but such as is paid in obedience to this command. And yet, God knows, this is generally the last thing we think of, when we place our affections. We respect our betters, because it is in their power to favour us; we love others, because of their endowments; and others, because they are good neighbours, or agreeable company. But where is the command of God all this while thought of?

And this, good Christians, is the reason why there is so little true love, and so much uncharitableness in the world. Christians will not consider God as a Lawgiver, who will reward and punish as men shall deserve; who, having given this positive command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" it is our duty to obey, whatever our biased reason or corrupt wills shall say to the contrary.

If this is the command of God, why then I shall not say, This man has not deserved it at my hands;—that man has done me an injury, and I will have the pleasure of doing him another;—such a man has said or done too much to be forgiven;—I have an aversion for such a man, and I will not speak to him. Why then you are not a Christian:—This is the language of unbelievers.

A Christian is to sacrifice all his aversions to the good pleasure of God. And it is a sacrifice most acceptable to God, when, for his sake, we will do our neighbour no wrong, though we could propose the greatest gain to ourselves; when for his sake, and because he has commanded us not to do it, we dare not *render evil for evil*, though revenge is sweet to flesh and blood;—when we will not bear malice in our hearts, though we could never so well conceal it from the eyes of men;—when, for *his* sake, we forgive injuries, though it is in our power to return them;—when we will not set at nought our brother,



brother, for the meanness of his condition, or the misfortunes that have befallen him;—when we sincerely desire our neighbour's welfare, and take delight in his prosperity, whatever envy might prompt us to;—when, for God's sake, we are ready to do good, and glad to communicate of what he has given us, to comfort the afflicted, to visit the sick, to instruct the ignorant, to protect the oppressed, to reconcile differences, to succour those that stand in need, notwithstanding the trouble and the expence of these duties.—When a man will deny himself, as Jesus Christ did, who, though he was rich, yet for *our sakes* became poor;—when those that are strong will bear with the infirmities of the weak, whatever pride would suggest to the contrary:—When these things are done in obedience to the command of God, they are *then a most acceptable sacrifice to the Divine Majesty.*

And let us seriously consider, that God has forbidden all things contrary to charity, not because men can hurt him by their wickedness, but because the uncharitable man cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven.

If men live in envy or malice; if they bite and devour one another; if men hate their neighbours, and imagine mischief against them; if they will not submit to their governors in Church and State; if they shall oppress or vex one another by fraud or violence, by corrupting their neighbour's wife or child, by bearing false witness, or coveting that which is another man's; why, it is sure, God has forbidden all these things: But for what reason? Why, because no man with these dispositions *can possibly* be happy, which God would have all his creatures to be.

III. I will now set before you *such instances and expressions of this command as are dispersed in God's Word, that at one sight you may see your duty.*

Now; the first degree of charity is, *not to despise any man living.* “He that despiseth his neighbour, (saith Solomon<sup>e</sup>) sinneth.” And truly there is no reason for it. We are all a race of *poor, vile, sinful* creatures at the best. And he that despiseth his neighbour is subject to the same *misfortunes*, to the same *failings*, to every thing that can make a man *contemptible*, if any thing ought to do so. I say ought to do so; for sure St. Peter would not have bid us *honour all men*, but that there is something in every man, for which a charitable man ought to pay some regard.

The next step of charity is, *to do our neighbour no harm, in body, goods, or good name.* “Love (saith St. Paul<sup>f</sup>) worketh no ill to his neighbour.” It would be very happy, if Christians would but conscientiously dis-

charge this part of charity; that they would not trouble or vex one another without cause; that they would not *over-reach* or *defraud* one another; that they would not *slander* and *backbite* one another; that they would not *rashly judge* one another; that they would not draw one another into intemperance, and other sins destructive to soul and body.

After all, this would be but a low degree of charity: for we are bound not only to *do no harm ourselves*, but to *prevent it* in others, as far as we are able. It was for this reason that in the Law<sup>g</sup> it is commanded, that if any man should see his neighbour's ox or sheep go astray, or his beast lie under a burthen, that he should take care of them.—What was this for, but to teach men, not only to look every man on his own concerns, but to be concerned for the interest of his neighbour, even where no law but this of charity can oblige us?

We are, in the next place, to take satisfaction in our neighbour's welfare, to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, and to be under concern when any thing sad or calamitous befalls him; to *mourn with them that mourn*, as the Apostle directs. We are also to be courteous and obliging to all men. Charity speaks kindly, deals tenderly, grieves not the hearts of the living, and treads softly upon the graves of the dead.

But this is not all. “Let us love” (saith the Apostle) “not in word only, but in deed and in truth;” that is, *doing good*, as well as giving good words. And indeed, without this instance of charity, we have no proof of our love for God: *He that hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?*

Lastly; there is another instance of this duty, the most necessary, and yet the most uneasy to flesh and blood; and that is, the Christian duty of *forgiving injuries, and loving our enemies.* Hear the very words of our Lord Christ,<sup>h</sup> “I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” “For, if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? Do not even the publicans the same?” Men of no principles, men who expect no reward hereafter.

And, as to *forgiving of injuries*, I shall only tell you, that *upon this very duty depends your pardon in heaven.* “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not

<sup>e</sup> Prov. xiv. 21.<sup>f</sup> Rom. xiii. 20.<sup>g</sup> Deut. xxii. 1. <sup>h</sup> Matth. v. 44, 46.

“men



“men *their* trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”<sup>1</sup> So that there is no mercy to be hoped for from God but upon this condition. Nay, it plainly appears by the parable, (set down Matth. xviii. 35.) that the Lord was more offended with his servant’s *unmerciful temper*, than with the loss of *ten thousand talents* that servant owed and could not pay.

IV. We now come, in the last place, to consider, *What helps God has afforded us, and what inducements we have, to possess our hearts with a grace every way so necessary to our present and future happiness.*

It is a very sad truth, there is very little charity amongst men: And yet as *men* we are made for society; we cannot live without one another. The Gospel makes us all *neighbours*; and Jesus Christ makes us all *brethren*. Why should we not then love as *men*, as *neighbours*, as *brethren*? Indeed we should do so; and I will tell you why we do not.

The Apostle<sup>k</sup> gives it as a mark of the *last* and *worst* of times, when “men shall be *lovers of their own selves*,” that is, without any regard to the welfare of others.—Wherever this vice reigns, there can be no charity, such as the Gospel requires. Our blessed Lord, knowing that as long as men looked upon worldly advantages as *their happiness*, they would despise all that wanted them, He did therefore put the lowest value upon every thing the world doats on. He was pleased to be born of poor parents; he wanted most of the conveniencies of life, yet never repined; he assured his followers, that riches, let them appear never so desirable, are very dangerous things; and would have such of his disciples as thought best of themselves, to be servants to the rest.

Now; what was this for, but to teach Christians that these things ought not to make any difference amongst them; that the world and its favours are not to be depended upon; that therefore Christians should not *love and hate* on account of *riches, or honour, or power*; but because Christ has commanded them to love one another, and because this will recommend them to the love of God.

As to that part of charity which is expressed in relieving the poor, you will, I hope, need no other inducement than that which our Lord sets before you, by his

Apostle: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”<sup>1</sup>

I have said already, that the obligation to *love* our enemies, and to *forgive* those that have injured us, is so great, that whoever does it not, is shut out from all hopes of mercy: His sins will not be forgiven; his prayers will not be heard.—And to a man who has any concern for himself, there need no other arguments to *this* branch of charity.

But the greatest inducement to the love of our neighbour is the consideration of the love of Christ for mankind:—“As I have loved you, that ye love one another?”—“This,” (saith Jesus Christ<sup>m</sup>) “is my command.” This shews us in what a sad estate Christianity is at this day, and what little power it has upon its professors, when so positive, so indispensable a command is so ill obeyed.

Let us, good Christians, seriously consider this;—let us endeavour to wean our affections from the world, and then we shall have very little to fall out about;—let us possess our souls with a true love of God, and then we shall, for his sake, love our neighbour as we ought to do;—let us consider the love of Christ for *us*, and then we shall blush and be ashamed to see how far short our charity is of his, who laid down his life for us;—and, though we cannot at once change the dispositions of our souls, yet let us at least command our outward actions. These are in our own power in some measure. We can be just, we can be courteous, we can speak well of men, we can do good offices of friendship, and we can pray for them; and then God, who by these outward actions sees our sincerity, will at last change our hearts.

And lastly, let us remember, that to love our neighbour, and to love him as ourselves, is a law by which we shall be judged at the last day; for which account, the Lord in mercy fit us all.

In order to which, let us most earnestly beg of God, *to pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of charity, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before God.*

Grant this, O Father, for the sake of thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, with Thee and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

<sup>1</sup> Matth. vi. 14, 15.

<sup>k</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 2.

<sup>1</sup> Acts xx. 35.

<sup>m</sup> John xv. 12.



## S E R M O N XXXIX.

## OF HOLINESS, WITHOUT WHICH NO MAN MUST SEE THE LORD.

Perfect, O God, what Thou hast begun in me; inspire me with such a lively Sense and clear Knowledge of thy Love, that I may be able to convince others of the Blessedness and the Necessity of Holiness, and the Way to attain it, thro' Jesus Christ. Amen.

H E B. xii. 14.

*Without Holiness no Man shall see the Lord.<sup>m</sup>*

**I**T is very much to be feared, that the generality of Christians do not know what that holiness is, without which we must never hope for salvation. And yet there is no thing which it concerns men more to know than *this*; because there is no thing more certain, than that a Christian, who is not endued with this grace, is no more capable of being happy in heaven, than a sick man is capable of taking pleasure in a sumptuous feast.

But this is not what is generally considered. Most people have a confused notion of heaven, as of a place where all Christians will one day be very happy; every one for himself making no manner of doubt, but it will be his *own* portion at the last; in the mean time taking little or no care to be qualified for it. And yet our Lord, to hinder Christians from falling into this sad delusion, has assured us, "That wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

And indeed a very little consideration would convince any man, how *utterly impossible* it is for an *unholy man* to see God in peace; for *to see the Lord*, that is, to know and to enjoy him, *is to see him as he is.*<sup>n</sup> It is to see a most *holy, just, and powerful* God;—One who, for their sin, turned the very Angels out of heaven into hell;—who destroyed the whole world with a flood, for their wickedness;—who, for their unholy lives, destroyed whole cities with fire and brimstone;—who has declared by his own Son, that this should be the very sentence, which (at the Day of Judgment) he shall pass upon ungodly sinners, "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels."

Now; let us but consider, how we bear the sight of a man like ourselves whom we have unworthily provoked, and who has it in his power to punish us; and then we may judge how a sinner can abide the sight of an angry God, whose service he has forsaken, whose invitations he has slighted, whose commands he has all his life long broken, whose offers of pardon he has rejected, neither regarding his threats, nor valuing his promises? How can such a sinner possibly bear the sight of such a one, and be happy? And is it not for this reason, that the Scriptures are every where so express, concerning the necessity, *the absolute necessity* of being converted, of becoming new creatures, of perfecting holiness in the fear of God? Is it not for this eternal reason, because WITHOUT HOLINESS NO MAN SHALL SEE THE LORD?—No man whatever, no man who hopes to be saved.

This shews the *delusion* of those who are apt to imagine, that they may be dispensed with for leading a *life of holiness*, either on account of their ignorance, bad circumstances, their profession, worldly business, their age, or the like. If no man, without this qualification, shall see the Lord, then neither the rich nor the poor, the master nor his servant, neither the clergy nor the laity, neither the husbandman nor the tradesman, neither the young nor the old, ought to satisfy themselves, ought to be easy, without that holiness which the Gospel requires of all its professors, of all who hope for happiness.

And indeed, as religion, and the holiness it requires, is necessary for every man, so is it consistent with every lawful calling and employment in the world. There have been holy princes, and holy beggars;—holy laymen, as well as holy clergymen;—piety in the shop and in the field, as well as in the closet and in the church. There have been

<sup>m</sup> See Rom. viii. 1, 2, 3, &c. 2 Cor. v. 17. Eph. iv. 23. iii. 9, 10. iv. 10. 1 Pet. i. 15.

<sup>n</sup> Matth. vii. 13, 14.

1 Thess. iv. 3, 7. 2 Tim. ii. 19. Tit. ii. 14. 1 John ii. 29. 1 John iii. 2.



devout foldiers and devout feamen. And God requires it ftill, which he would not do, were it not *neceffary*, were it not *confiftent* with every condition of life.

How *neceffary* it is, we fhall eafily fee, if we confider the condition we are in, by reafon of the fin of our firft parents. Indeed we are all of us ready enough to own that we are fubject to fin; and the confequence is, we do many things that difpleafe God, and make him our enemy; and then it is very natural for us not to love him, not to defire to be where he is. And until this diforder be mended, God can take no pleasure in us, we can take no delight in him, we can hope for no favour from him.

To mend this great diforder, and that we may not be for ever miserable, God has appointed us to be *holy*, as the only way to be *happy*: He has given us *rules* and *means* to make us fo; and he has made known to us the danger of not clofing with them. It concerns us, therefore, *more than our life is worth*, to be truly informed,

*First*; In what this holinefs confifts.

*Secondly*; What it is which the generality of Chriftians fatisfy themfelves with, inftead of true holinefs.

*Thirdly*; How this habit of holinefs is to be attained.

And *laftly*; To have fome fure marks, by which we may have the comfort of knowing that we are in the way of holinefs, and confequently of happinefs.

And thefe are the things which I would defire you to confider with the moft ferious attention.

I. We will firft confider, *What this holinefs is, which is fo neceffary to our happinefs*.

Now all Chriftians, being dedicated to God in baptifm, are thereby become *HOLY TO THE LORD*; that is, God is pleafed to look upon them as his own, and to give them laws to govern themfelves by; and they oblige themfelves to obey thefe laws. He gives them his Holy Spirit to enable them to do fo; and promifes them eternal life, if they continue faithful to their vows.

Now if Chriftians, when they come to years of difcretion, would lay thefe things ferioufly to heart, they would moft thankfully make good the conditions promifed on their part; that is, they would endeavour to be *holy*, as He is *holy* to whom they are *dedicated*. But, inftead of being fo, too many quite forget that they are Chriftians, and fall into fuch ways of living, as makes God their enemy, and forfeit all the bleffings which he had promifed them. And moft fad would have been the confequence, had

not God, who forefaw this diforder, provided alfo a remedy; and this is, *a fincere Repentance for fins paff*; and *a fincere Obedience afterwards*. But then, Chriftians muft beware of abufing this goodnefs; for, *if they fail in thefe*, THERE ARE NO HOPES OF MERCY.

So that you fee that THIS HOLINESS, without which no man muft fee the Lord, muft begin in a SINCERE REPENTANCE,—in devoting ourfelves *a-new* to GOD, and in ftudying to pleafe him all our days, by leading a life agreeable to the Gospel of Chrift.—And moft miferably blind are they who will not fee the danger of *putting off their repentance*; for while they do fo, they are in the way of damnation.

Now every finner who is *startled* at this, and knows that the *grace of repentance* is the gift of GOD, will beg it of him with the *greateft earneftnefs*, and *without delay*, as a moft neceffary preparation for that *holinefs*, without which he muft be *miferable* for ever.

In what that holinefs confifts, we now come to confider. And, in general, it confifts in fuch a *prevailing love of God* as makes a Chriftian to hate all fin, as a thing moft hateful to God; to be afraid of, and to avoid all temptations to every thing that he believes will difpleafe God: Such a love as makes us zealous to promote the glory of God, and to *pleafe* him in every thing; defirous to know his will, and refolved at all times to obey it; and chearfully clofing with all the *means* which he has ordained to work in us thefe holy difpofitions.

But to be a little more particular, and to confider it, as it has relation to God, to our Neighbour, and to Ourfelves.

Holinefs with regard to God confifts in a *firm faith in God as our Creator and Redeemer*,—in a juft dread of his *power*,—in a thankful fenfe of his *goodnefs*,—in a grateful acknowledgment of his *mercies*,—in hearing his word with a glad mind,—and in fubmitting our reafon to the revelation he has made of himfelf, and of his will;—in obeying his laws; and at all times owning our dependance upon him, by praying to him for whatever we want, and ever praifing him for his daily favours;—in having a great regard for every thing that belongs to *him*, his *word*, his *day*, his *houfe*, his *ordinances*, and his *minifters*. And whoever fails in any of thefe particulars *wilfully*, will fail in a very material part of *holinefs* with regard to God himfelf.

Holinefs which refpects our Neighbour confifts in *loving him fincerely*; that is, in doing to *him* all that in reafon we defire fhould be done to ourfelves; particularly, in being juft and kind to him, in relieving his neceffities;—in



—in forgiving our enemies, and praying for them;—in comforting the afflicted;—in giving good advice to those that stand in need of or desire it;—in reproving those that sin, and in being ready to every good work;—in a dutiful obedience to our superiors, whether in church or state;—and lastly, in being so exemplary in our lives, as to lead others to *love*, to *fear*, and to *serve* God.

And then, for that *Holiness* which relates to *Ourselves*; it consists, in keeping the *body pure and undefiled, as the temple of God ought to be*, and the mind as free from errors as possible;—in serving God devoutly, and making religion our delight, as it is our duty;—in abstaining from every thing that is evil;—in remembering our past sins with detestation; and in returning to our duty without delay, whenever we are sensible that we have done amiss;—in moderating our desires after all earthly things, whether they be pleasures, riches, or honours;—in submitting to the will of God, being content with that condition his providence has ordered for us;—bearing afflictions patiently, and endeavouring to profit by them;—in denying our own wills and desires, and in weaning our hearts from the world, that we may *love God above all things*, which is the sure principle of holiness, and the greatest happiness of a soul ready to part from the body.

And they that satisfy themselves with any thing less than this holiness which we have now described, they do it at their utmost peril.

II. This will oblige us to make some reflections upon those delusions with which too many Christians make their minds easy, instead of striving after that Holiness which the Gospel requires.

And in the first place, it is but too plain that very many satisfy themselves with the bare name of being Christians. And they that would think it a great misfortune to want Christian baptism, can yet be content to live all their days in an utter neglect of the vows they then made of *leading an holy life*. They can be content to do *that* which they would not have the patience to hear any man say they might do with safety; that is, that provided they be Christians, it is no matter how careless lives they lead.

Christians would do well to consider what the Spirit of God saith, That we are *heirs of salvation* upon no other terms than these, “That denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.” And whoever does not do so, his Christian-name will be of little use to him.

The next great mistake is of those who place *Holiness* in outward devotion; in at-

tending the publick worship; in hearing the word, and observing ordinances.—Christians should consider, that these are only means of attaining holiness; that as such they are necessary to be observed; but that they are otherways of no value in the sight of God, if they do not help to free us from the slavery of sin; cure us of an immoderate love for the world; increase our faith and hope in God; and bring us to love him with all our hearts, and our neighbour for his sake.

“Who has required this at your hand, to tread my courts?”<sup>a</sup> was the very question which God asked those Jews, who were careful to attend the temple service, but took no care to lead a life answerable to such a practice.

There are many who satisfy themselves with leading a moral, harmless life, (as people love to speak) but without any regard to the law of God, or taking any care to regulate the heart, or to cure its corruptions; and lastly, without acknowledging the necessity of a Redeemer. Now; though this sort of holiness might be commendable in an Heathen, yet it will never be accepted from Christians. To bring forth *no fruit* was cause sufficient for that sentence upon the barren tree, “Cut it down, and cast it into the fire.”

Christians should know, that faith is the only principle of holiness; because it is faith only that can create in us those holy dispositions,—of thankfulness to God for his mercies, of loving his law, of desiring to please him, and of dreading his anger;—all which are absolutely necessary to fit us for the vision of God.

There is another sad mistake which many Christians labour under, and that is, *in depending upon good purposes*. They know they are not what they should be; they wish, and hope, and resolve, that it shall not always be so; and are so weak as to imagine, that there is something which pleaseth God in such good purposes; though at the same time they suffer the world, its cares, its pleasures, and all its idols, to possess their hearts. Now this is so far from lessening, that it increases their guilt; while they make no better use of those holy purposes which the good Spirit of God put into their minds, in order to lead them to a true conversion.

There is another mistake as fatal and as common; it is that of those, who confess, are sorry for, and forsake their sins for a while, and then return to them again.—Now; this is just as much an *holy life*, as that man's is a *regular life*, who lives disorderly till he is sick, takes up till he is well, and then re-

<sup>a</sup> Titus ii. 12.

<sup>a</sup> Isaiah i. 12.



turns to his follies, and does so till death puts an end to an ill-spent life.

Christians are but too apt to seek for their own justification in the bad lives of others. *I am not as bad as that publican* was an old device to make the mind easy without true holiness; and Christians follow the example without perceiving it. God grant that the judgment which our Lord has given in this very case, may cure all Christians of so pernicious a mistake!

But then there are those who comfort themselves with *this thought*,—That they are no worse than others:—*Every man has his failings, and I have mine.* So that covetousness is one man's failing; drunkenness is another's; whoredom, perhaps, is another's; injustice, profane swearing, backbiting, hatred, variance, despising the ordinances of God, are the failings of others. Now; what a place do Christians suppose that heaven is, if such as these shall be its inhabitants? St. Paul's words, if seriously attended to and believed, would cure Christians of this mistake: "I tell you that they which do such things, shall not inherit the kingdom of God." And then they may know what is like to be their portion.

Why then, say others, this is enough to make people *fall into despair*; if such a change of heart and life, such a care of the soul, such holy dispositions, are necessary to fit us for heaven and happiness.

Why now in truth, Christians, while they lead unholy lives, *should* despair of salvation. And it would be the greatest cruelty to persuade them to hope well for themselves, until they can be persuaded to live up to that measure of knowledge and strength which God has for the present given them, and according to the condition of life in which the providence of God has placed them. It is not required that Christians should be perfect at once, or all equally perfect; but it is absolutely necessary, that all Christians should sincerely endeavour to please God to the best of their power, and then they are as perfect as God would have them to be.

We know how hard it will be to cure very many Christians of another great delusion,—of thinking that they have *time enough* before them to get such habits of holiness as the Gospel requires. Some think they are *too young* to set about so serious a work; others imagine that worldly business will excuse them for the present.—Let us put these and such-like pretences into their true language, and see how it will sound:—It is too soon to be *holy*; that is, it is too soon to love God, to keep his commands, to strive

to please him: But when I have had my share of worldly pleasures as others have had before me, which I cannot have if I should *now* devote myself to God, *then* I will begin to be holy. When I have got wealth enough to make the remainder of my life very easy, which I cannot do so soon as I would without breaking some of God's laws, *then* I will become a new man. I know it may be said to me, as it has been to thousands before me, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee." I know likewise, that God hath said, "To-day, if ye will hear my voice, harden not your hearts; lest ye never enter into my rest." I know too, that the longer I go on in the ways of sin, the harder it will be to take up. But all this shall not discourage me; I will go on, though I perish eternally.

This, I say again, is the *true language* of such as *put off their conversion*. Let but people speak in these words, and see how it will fit upon their minds.

And this brings us to the last and great mistake of all, which is, of those many who place all their hopes of being *holy* and *happy*, IN A DEATH-BED REPENTANCE.—Most people being serious when they come to die, and shewing a great concern for having lived no better, this is called repentance. And it being often said of such as had lived bad lives, *that they made a very good end*; and people, in their last wills, leaving their souls to God, in hopes that he will receive them into Paradise, as sure as their friends will give their bodies a Christian burial; and none returning from the dead, to shew the sad mistake; hence it is, that unthoughtful people flatter themselves with vain hopes, that all almost are happy when they die.

Christians would do much better to conclude, that God will not depart from the declaration he has made: "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord;" and therefore all, who live without holiness, *must* die without hopes of mercy. And then, what will all these sad delusions we have mentioned profit those who depend upon them? Happy they who lay hold of the present time, and by a speedy conversion enter into the way of holiness, and continue in it unto their lives' end!

III. And this brings us to consider, *How this Holiness is to be attained*. It is not the work of nature but of grace, to "perfect holiness in the fear of God." It is for this reason we are obliged to make use of all those *means*, which God has appointed to fit us for heaven; the chief of which are, the *Word*, and *Prayer*: By the first our *Faith* is increased, and by the second our *Graces*.



Now every Christian, whose heart God has touched with a sincere desire of becoming holy, (for it is to such only one can speak to any saving purposes) must seriously consider, what God has made known in his Word concerning *himself*, his *will*, and concerning *mankind*. For instance:—In *that Word*, we see our own *corruption*, our *weakness*, and our *danger*. We there read, how men, ever since there were men, have been provoking God by their wickedness, and how God has punished them continually. We there learn, that we are all of the same race and make; all subject to the same sins, and to the same punishment.

The same Word makes known to us the *great goodness of God*; that in order to rescue us out of the power of the Devil, and to deliver us from the slavery of sin, he has put us under the government of his own Son; and has promised to make us eternally happy, if it be not our own fault. That he is so good as to call us his children, that we may live as becomes children of so holy a Father; and that we may depend upon his *love*, upon his *promises*, and upon his *assistance*, as a child may do upon the love of a tender Father.

And knowing that if he should suffer us to follow our own natural inclinations, we should certainly ruin ourselves, he has therefore given us *Laws*, not only to keep us from sin and misery, but to make us partakers of a divine nature; that is, to make us *holy*, that we may be capable of being *happy*.

That we may have these laws always before us, he has appointed his *Ministers* to explain them, and to sound them continually in the ears of all such as shall be disposed to hear and to obey them: And to all such he has promised his Holy Spirit, to enlighten their understandings; to enable them to keep his laws; and to overcome all the difficulties they can possibly meet with.

And lest the difficulties of an holy life should affright them, or the commands of Jesus Christ should seem hard to flesh and blood; this same *Word of God* sets before us the very different portions of good and bad men in the next life, in these most affecting words: “The hour is coming, in the which  
“all that are in the graves shall hear the  
“voice of the Son of God, and shall come  
“forth; they that have done good unto  
“the resurrection of life; and they that  
“have done evil, unto the resurrection of  
“damnation.”

And now; what has a Christian to do, who has any concern for his everlasting well-being, but to lay hold of the other *great means of salvation*? and that is, PRAYER,

• John v. 28, 29.

*which is the only sure remedy for all our wants and disorders?* What has a sinner, who is awakened with these truths, to do, but to beg of God to give him a true sense of his unhappy state, and grace and strength to break his bonds? What has he to do, but to put his cause into the hands of *Jesus Christ*, who is our Advocate and Peace-maker with God; the price of whose blood is sufficient to procure a full discharge of all his sins; to beg of *him* to remove all those hindrances to a true conversion, which the Devil, or his own corrupt nature, have laid in his way; and to give him that repentance to which he has promised mercy and pardon?

He will also beg of God, to create in him a new heart,—to enable him to wear his affections from things temporal,—to redeem his mispent time, and faithfully discharge the duties of his place;—to convince him of the necessity of *mortification*, of *self-denial*, and of *watching* continually; that he may lay hold on all occasions of doing what he believes will please God, and of avoiding what God has forbidden.

And if to his prayers he adds the often thinking of what must come hereafter, the thoughts of *death* will help to cure him of a too great fondness for this world;—the thoughts of a *Day of Judgment* will oblige him to strict holiness, justice, and charity, that in that day of visitation he may find mercy;—the fear of *hell* will oblige him to take any pains here, that he may escape the bitter pains of eternal death;—and the hopes of *heaven* will help to sweeten all the troubles of this mortal life.

These are the most sure means of attaining *holiness*. And as no man who hopes for heaven can be excused from being *holy*, so no Christian (especially amongst us) can pretend to want the means of becoming so.

Every Christian has an opportunity of *bearing the Word of God*, and of learning his duty; of joining in the prayers of the church for every *grace*, for every *virtue*, for every *blessing*, he can possibly stand in need of, which God never denies to the sincere, and which the most *unlearned* have a right to, as well as the most *learned*, provided the heart be right; for there is the defect, if any, and never in the means.

Whoever therefore aspires after holiness, and lays hold of the means, *will certainly be renewed by the Spirit that is in him*. And though to us evil habits may seem incurable, and true holiness almost impossible, considering our corrupt affections, yet they are not so to HIM *who hath called us unto holiness*; and who, by doing so, has obliged himself to give us all necessary assistance. But then let us remember, that we never shall be

*holy*,



holy; never happy, without our own sincere endeavours.

And now you see, good Christians, what a great value you ought to have for the Word of God, by which we obtain that faith which is necessary to purify the heart. You see that all they who despise God's Ministers, who "are ordained for the perfecting of the Saints," are out of God's way of becoming holy. His Word, his Day, his House, the Sacraments, are all called holy, because God has appointed them as means to make us holy, and to keep us in the way of holiness.

Lastly; you see the blindness of those who pretend to be righteous and holy upon principles of natural reason, without the word and the grace of God. They are ignorant of this truth, that no man can be holy but he that believeth that Jesus is the Christ; that is, who receives him as his Saviour, his Pattern, his Mediator, his Sovereign, and his Lawgiver.

IV. We now come, in the last place, to consider, *How a Christian may make a judgment of the state he is in, with respect to this so necessary a qualification.* But this, at present, I must do in a very few words, having already detained you too long.

And in the first place let us lay this down for a truth, *that the manner of our life is the only sure proof of our holiness.* We are sure that we ourselves are alive, because we act like living men. Now, if we live and act like Christians, we may be as sure, that we are living members of Christ's body, and in the way of holiness. And we know that we live like Christians, when we love God and keep his commandments, *this being the only sure proof of our love of God.*

When therefore we are sure that we do not live in any known sin, when sin is uneasy to us, when we avoid it and all temptations to it, and by this means get the mastery over our corruptions; when we keep our hearts pure, and suffer no sin knowingly to harbour there, which is *the only sure sign that we fear God, the searcher of hearts*; when we pray to God continually for light to know, and power to do our duty, and conscientiously make use of the ordinary means of grace; when the commands of God are no longer grievous to us, and the great truths of the Gospel affect our hearts, and make us more serious, more charitable, more just, more temperate, more devout;—why then we conclude, we are certainly in the way of holiness; especially if we are careful to discharge the duties proper to our state and condition of life, for which we shall be most accountable at the great day.

\*Eph. iv. 13.

If the rich, for instance, are rich in good works,—if the poor are contented with their lot,—if young people are modest, and careful to preserve their reputation and their innocence,—and married people are mindful of the vows they made before God, and live in peace and godliness. If parents bring up their children in the fear of God, and honestly provide for their necessary support;—if masters take care that their servants live as becomes Christians, and treat them as such with humanity and justice; and servants are faithful in what belongs to their place and trust;—if men of trade and business act uprightly, without taking advantage of the necessities or ignorance of those with whom they deal;—if such as are in affliction do patiently submit to the chastisement of the Lord; and such as are in prosperity be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God;—if such as are ignorant are desirous to learn their duty, and thankful to those that are willing to instruct them;—if they that are in authority consider that they are in the place of God, and resolve to govern with justice and integrity, and their subjects yield them due obedience without defrauding them of their tribute;—and lastly, if Pastors, mindful of the great account they must give, are solicitous for the good of their flock, and these are ready to follow their godly admonitions.—These are all instances of that holiness which God has commanded, which he is pleased with, and which he will reward, provided they are performed in obedience to his laws.

"Every man, therefore, that has this "hope," (of seeing God in peace) "must "purify himself even as He is pure." If death overtakes any of us, before this is done, we are ruined for ever.

Every man who wishes well to his own soul, cannot but be very thoughtful when he considers these things. Let us not stifle such thoughts; they are certainly from the good Spirit of God: Let us therefore dwell upon them; let us improve them to our great advantage.

Let such as have arrived to any good degree of holiness, bless God for it, and beg of him the grace of perseverance. Let such as are yet unconverted, beg of God the grace of conversion: It is the only thing they ought to pray for, and it is the only favour God will grant them; and he will certainly grant it to every one who asks it sincerely. And it is this very thing which will be the condemnation of all such as die unconverted,—That God called them to holiness,—that he put them into the way of attaining it,—that they might have had all necessary assistance for asking, and heaven and happiness for

\* 1 John iii. 3.

their



their pains, and yet they continue insensible, and die without hopes of mercy.

May God awaken all such as have it yet in their power to work out their salvation with a salutary fear of what must come hereafter! And may every soul of us consider of what moment it is to know whether we are like to be justified or condemned, when we shall ap-

pear before God; there being no truth more certain than *this*, which therefore I would leave upon your minds; *That whoever lives without holiness, will die without any reasonable hopes of mercy.*

May God Almighty set this home upon all our hearts, for the Lord Christ's sake. To whom, &c.

## S E R M O N XL.

ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΙΣ. THE RESURRECTION; OR, THE REWARD OF HOLINESS.

LUKE XX. 34, 35, 36.

*Jesus answering, said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the Angels, and are the children of God, being the children of the Resurrection.\**

THESE Sadducees did, in very deed, argue like themselves; that is, like men who *did not believe a resurrection*.—Whether our Lord's answer convinced them of their error, or how far their prejudices might excuse them before God, is not material for us to know; especially since *this point is now* put out of all manner of doubt amongst Christians, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead. But this is very material to be observed, that their error proceeded from *their not knowing the Scriptures*.

This was their great crime; they would not believe a *future state*, because they could not answer all the objections that the wanton wit of man could invent against such a state. The truth is, they were very fond of every thing that might confirm them in their unbelief, and neglected the Scriptures, which alone could have given them a sure account of what they doubted. And thus it will always be, where people will not believe the Word of God, when it is not agreeable to their own weak reasonings.

However, we are no losers by these people's infidelity and curiosity; for in convincing them of their error, our Lord has made known one of the most important and comfortable truths; namely, That at the general resurrection, such as have behaved themselves worthily in this life shall become immortal as the Angels;—that instead of a *natural or animal body*, which stands in need of food and air to support it, they shall

have a *spiritual body*, which will need neither;—that in *that state* there will be no need of marriage to preserve their kind, *for they shall never die*, but shall continue in the presence of God, in a state of perfect happiness for ever.

And let us not imagine, that there was no need of such a revelation as this to encourage us to do what God expects from us, in order to our happiness. They that know any thing of themselves, know very well, with what difficulty we are brought even to think of another life:—But to love it better than this; to deny a present pleasure for one that is to come; to suffer here in hopes of being rewarded hereafter; there was an absolute necessity that the reward should be *very great, and very certain*; and so it is: *They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, shall be equal unto the Angels*; that is, after death they shall be happy, and immortal as *they*.

And who is it that affirms this? No less a person than the Son of God; whom God sent from heaven on purpose to make known to us *this*, amongst other things, That men may be much happier in the next world, than they can possibly be in *this*, if it be not their own fault;—particularly, he assures them, that after the resurrection they shall *never die any more; their inheritance shall be for ever; they shall receive a crown of glory, that fadeth not away*.

It is true, these are general expressions; but the Apostle tells us why the happiness

\* See Job xix. 26. Isaiah xxv. 8. Matth. xxv. 34. John xi. 26. Rom. viii. 18. 1 Cor. v. 7. xv. 19, 42, 43, 44, 54, 58. 2 Cor. v. 1. Eph. i. 18. 1 Pet. i. 3. 1 John iii. 2. Rev. xx. 14.



of the next life is not described more particularly:—"Eye (saith he) hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him;"<sup>2</sup> that is, It is utterly impossible so to describe or compare the state of the life to come to any thing we *see*, or *hear*, so as to be able to comprehend it. For this, we must either believe God's word, or continue unbelievers to our own great loss. We are to live *here by faith, not by sight*; that is, we must order our conversation not by what we see, or can understand, in *this* world, but by what we believe and expect in the *next*.

But then, that Christians may not be charged with being too easy of belief, in expecting an happiness which they are never like to enjoy, God has been pleased to give us the utmost proof that men in reason can desire, that *all the glorious things that are spoken of the city of God, the habitation of the blessed, are certainly true*: He has, I say, given us assurance of this, in *raising our Lord from the dead*.

To *this* the Apostles and first Christians appealed, as to a *matter of fact*, of which they had been eye-witnesses, for the truth of which they were ready to lay down their lives, and at last did so. And the providence of God so ordered matters, that the enemies of Christianity should have nothing in reason to say against the truth of Christ's resurrection. They set a watch upon his grave;—their own watch informed them of what had happened when he rose from the dead;—they were forced to give them moneys to stifle the truth, and set about a lie; and yet they themselves had not the assurance to persist in this lie, when Peter and John (Acts iv.) told them, that to their own certain knowledge he was risen from the dead; they had not *then* the face to say, "that his disciples had stolen him away," but only, "you would bring this man's blood upon us." Nay, they themselves were so far from believing their own lie, that they consented to the counsel of Gamaliel, lest, if what the Apostles affirmed should be true, *they should be found at the last to fight against God*.

In short; in those days in which these things were done, the truth of Christ's resurrection was not questioned. The circumstances of the thing,—the number of the witnesses,—their resolution to die rather than to deny what they had seen and heard,—in the mean time, the great power of God attending them in *signs*, and *wonders*, and surprising *miracles*,—stopped the mouths of gainfayers; and the Gospel, *founded upon this truth*, spread over all the world.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 9.

They believed Jesus Christ to be a divine person sent from God; and sent from God to reveal his will and purposes to men. They therefore thought themselves obliged to enquire diligently, what he had taught while he lived amongst men,—what he had promised to his faithful followers,—what men might expect by embracing his Gospel.—And upon the whole they found, that Jesus Christ had not gained disciples by vain promises of worldly advantages. No: He told them plainly, that the next world was the place where Christians were to expect their reward;—that in the mean time they were to live by faith in his promises. He assured them likewise, that to try the sincerity of their faith, they should meet with a great many troubles, *that their faith and hope might be in God*; that he expected nothing from them but what he himself would undergo: And he did do so; for, "for the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame;" for which God hath highly exalted him; and so he will do all his faithful followers. "They shall be equal to the Angels; they shall be the children of God;" that is, they shall be *immortal and happy*.

These are the happy circumstances which all good Christians shall be placed in at the resurrection. And God (you see) has been most surprisingly careful and merciful to us, not to let us want all the evidence that our hearts can desire, that this shall be our portion, if we are not wanting to ourselves; this being one of the most powerful motives to fit us for such a state.

For a firm belief of the unspeakable happiness of those *who die in the Lord*, and whose portion shall be with the *spirits of just men made perfect*, who shall be the children of God, and equal unto the Angels,—a firm belief and expectation of this, will have these three excellent effects: *First*; It will help to sweeten all the bitter passages of this mortal life. *Secondly*; It will help to cure us of a too great fondness for this world, which we are too apt to doat on, and which hinders us very much in our way to heaven. *Thirdly*; It will help us to run with patience the race that is set before us; that is, to perform all the duties of Christianity with cheerfulness.

I. *A firm belief of immortal happiness will help to sweeten all the bitter passages of this mortal life.*

Whatever the world promises, sad experience, as well as the wisest of men, assures us, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit." But this is not the worst of it; there are afflictions which are unavoidable, and would be intolerable, if we had no hopes of seeing an end of them.



But death, you will say, will put an end to all the troubles of *this* life: Be it so. But then this very remedy is itself the greatest of all afflictions; for a man to know that he *must* die, and not to know what his condition shall be after death. Well might the Apostle<sup>a</sup> say, such men, "through fear of death, are all their life long subject to bondage."

God be praised, this is not the case of Christians, unless they are very much wanting to themselves. They may suffer, but if they keep in their eye the rewards of a future state, and live like men that do so, they *cannot* be miserable. When a man can see an end of his miseries, and by bearing them as becomes a Christian, can be sure of a reward,—and of such a reward as the best and wisest men have willingly laid down their lives to obtain; this will support his spirits, and fill his soul with comforts, while his body is in pain; while disasters follow one another; when friends forsake him, and enemies oppress him; while the world frowns upon him, and poverty threatens him like an armed man.

In all these cases, a good Christian labours to support his soul with such considerations as these:—A time is coming when these afflictions will be over. Though I am now beset with infirmities, yet hereafter I shall have a body entirely free from pain and disorders of all kinds. Though I am poor *now*, yet I have this comfort, that God can make me sufficient amends in the next world for what I want in this. In the mean while, I know *this* to my comfort, that God has very often tried the faith of his best servants after a more severe way, in order to fit them for greater glory. It was thus he dealt with Job, whom he suffered to become the most miserable of men, before he would reward his patience and piety with a croud of unexpected blessings. It was thus that God visited the man after his own heart, even after he had designed him for the greatest happiness. In short; it was *thus* the Son of God himself was dealt with; this was the way which he hath sanctified by his blessed example, commanding his disciples to follow his steps, encouraging them in their sufferings with the promises of eternal blessings.

II. Secondly; *A firm belief of what we shall be after the resurrection, will help to cure us of a too great fondness for the world.*

What would an Angel give for the best estate or place upon earth? Why do not we believe that a time is coming, when we shall be as much above all the glories of this world, as the Angels are *now*? Yes, we believe this; but our fault is, we do not lay

it to heart; we do not compare the happiness of heaven with the present advantages we either aim at or enjoy. We do not, as the Apostle tells us all true believers do, "Look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal;"<sup>b</sup> that is, A true believer keeps his eye upon what he expects hereafter, and will not be diverted from pursuing a crown of glory, that fadeth not away, by every tempting trifle he meets with in the way.

Thus, when Abraham had God's promise that he should have a Son,—that his seed should in after-ages possess that land in which he was a stranger,—he was as well satisfied as if the thing were already come to pass, and he acted accordingly. He weaned his affections from his native country; he would not be tempted to stay in fruitful Egypt any longer than his necessities required; neither his own, nor his wife's great age hindered him from depending upon the promises of God; and God rewarded his faith, and answered the desires of his heart.

Why now, good Christians, we have the word of the Son of God for it, that in a short time, "when this mortal shall have put on immortality," we shall be as happy as the Angels of God. Then we shall be amazed at the madness of those who preferred a temporal *gain*, or *pleasure*, or *honour*, to the glories of heaven, which will last for ever.

And oh! that Christians would but lay this seriously to heart, before it is too late; that they would behave themselves as *strangers and pilgrims in this world*, and look upon the next as the place where true joys are to be found. Then should we not be tempted with earthly pleasures, nor doat upon the things now, which we shall then despise and abhor; and be astonished that creatures made for, and having the promise of eternal happiness, if they will but in good earnest strive for it, should yet choose eternal death, rather than renounce a present, short, unsatisfactory enjoyment.

We find by sad experience, that not only the enjoyment, but the *very desire* of the good things of this world, do very much indispose, and hinder us from pursuing the prize of our high calling, with that earnestness which it deserves. "How hardly (saith our Lord) shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven." For they have so many and strong temptations to love this world, and set up their rest here, that the happiness of the world to come finds no place in their thoughts.

<sup>a</sup> Heb. ii. 15.

<sup>b</sup> Cor. iv. 18.



Happy then are they, who have seen the vanity of this world, and have so long considered the blessings of the world to come; that faith has made those blessings *present* to them; and they see and feel (what others laugh at them for) that for the joys of heaven, *though at a distance*, one ought to part with any satisfaction upon earth.

III. Thirdly; *A firm belief of the consequences of the resurrection will very much help us to run with patience the race that is set before us*: That is, it will help us to perform all those duties of Christianity, which are absolutely necessary to fit us for heaven.—For if we believe that God is a rewarder of such as *diligently* seek him; if we are thoroughly convinced of *this*, and that the reward we expect will be inconceivably great; then shall we apply ourselves to the obtaining it, like men that are really in earnest, with *unwearied diligence*.

And truly, there is need of a *right understanding* of these things, of a *firm faith*, and very *lively hopes*, and most *glorious promises*, to make us go through so many Christian duties, which are so uneasy to flesh and blood, and yet are indispensably necessary to eternal happiness.

For my part, I should be at a loss for arguments to persuade a man, either to *watch*, or *pray*, or to *deny himself*, or to *be in charity* with all men, if I could not first convince him, that he will be the greatest gainer by doing these things;—particularly, that he has the promise of a most *glorious reward*; that he has many and powerful enemies that envy him such a reward, and will not fail to divert him from pursuing it, if he is not very *watchful* over himself;—that God will give him all the assistance that is necessary, provided he *prays* for it with the seriousness of one that is in good earnest;—that the life and joys of heaven will be quite of another kind than those which we are naturally fond of here;—that therefore we must wean our affections from sensual pleasures,—bring ourselves by degrees to follow the will of God with readiness and satisfaction, whenever we know it; this being one of the duties, and the delight of the inhabitants of heaven:—In short, that we must use some *self-denial* to effect this, and to alter the bent of our inclinations, or else we shall never be happy as we hope to be.

Lastly; if I could convince him, that in heaven there is *no sourness of temper*, no *selfish ends*, no *jarring* or *undermining one another*, no *jealousy* and *suspicion*;—that such evil dispositions as these will render a man utterly incapable of heaven, where all the inhabitants live in good understanding with one another, and in the strictest bonds of love,

rejoicing in one another's happiness, and praising God for his goodness to others as well as to themselves.

When a man is once convinced of this, then he will see how necessary that *charity* is, which the Gospel requires, to help us to get rid in time of such evil affections and habits, as, if not cured *here*, will most surely hinder us of the happiness we expect *there*.

And seeing the reasonableness of these duties, and how absolutely necessary they are, *to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light*, a Christian will set about them in good earnest, as he hopes for salvation: at least, if this will not prevail with us to do so, nothing else will. St. Paul, therefore, concludes all his discourse of the resurrection, and everlasting life after death, with these words: “Be ye therefore steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord;” intimating, that the serious belief of an immortal happiness will keep us *steadfast* in the faith, notwithstanding the troubles we meet with; *unmoved* by the temptations of the world; *always abounding in the work of the Lord*; that is, doing the duties of Christianity with patience and joy in the Holy Ghost.

And now, good Christians, you see, first, how much it concerns every body who professes to believe the resurrection of the body, and an everlasting life after death, so to order his life in *this* world, that in the next he may be happy.

Consider, secondly, whence you have this assurance of immortal happiness. It is not from conjecture, not from the vain and weak reasonings of men like ourselves, *but from the mouth of the Son of God*. It is he who tells us, that the children of the resurrection shall never die, but shall be equal to the Angels.

But then observe, thirdly, that the same God of Truth, who gives us this comfortable hopes, assures us, at the same time, that there is something to be done on our part, in order to obtain it. It is not every one who professes to believe these things that shall be happy as Angels, but they that shall be *worthy*; that is, they, who through faith in the promises of God, have been encouraged to deny all “ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;” looking for that blessed hope—which God has given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ.

So that the belief of a resurrection, and an everlasting life, will easily be perceived



to be of little *use* or *comfort* to one who will not be persuaded to prepare for it.

For, fourthly, as death puts the righteous into a state of endless happiness, which truth we very readily close with, so does it send the wicked into a condition miserable beyond expression, which we believe with some difficulty; and yet are assured of both these truths by the same God of Truth, that if either hopes or fears will prevail upon us, we may not want motives to work out our salvation.

Lastly; let us seriously consider, that whether we believe, or do not believe, these things, *that* will not make them true or false: The councils of God must stand; and if he has declared that he will raise us up at the last day, and judge every man according to his works done in the body; if he has, of his infinite mercy, appointed a place and state of happiness for the righteous, and a place of torment and punishment for the wicked, why then this will be the portion both of the one and the other, whether men believe, whether they think so, or not.

As for such as know themselves to have no religion, no fear of God before their eyes, they know likewise that they are not *worthy*, that is, meet to be made partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in heaven; and without a timely repentance they never can be happy. They know it, and all the arguments in the world cannot give them a greater assurance than their own consciences.

But then there are others, who, because they profess to believe these things, are therefore under no apprehensions of any danger, although they take no thought, no pains, to fit themselves for the heavenly life. They love the world as well as if they desired never to leave it;—they run into temptations to sin;—what they call repentance is no more than asking God's pardon, and, upon the first occasion, running into the same sins again;—in short, they pray without concern to be heard, without a sense of

their wants, without being convinced of their own misery, without knowing the danger they are in; and after all, they die in peace, and in hopes of a joyful resurrection.

Why now, my Christian brethren, if any of you be conscious to himself that this is his own case, let him know, that none shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, but such who have had their conversation in heaven while they were on earth; who with an eye of faith have seen, and were persuaded of, the glory which God hath prepared for his Saints, and make it the very chief business of their life to become worthy, that is, meet for the kingdom of heaven. For, as Jesus Christ died, so he was also raised for us, "That we should not henceforth live unto ourselves, but unto him who died and rose again for us."<sup>a</sup>

Let us therefore, as many of us as are verily persuaded of the truth of these things, let us be persuaded also to raise our hearts and affections above the little concerns of this world. Live in it we must, as long as God is pleased we should, because it is the place appointed for our trial and improvement; but, after all, it is not the place where we are to expect our happiness; nor where we should lay up our treasure, lest, our hearts being there also, we never aspire after that happiness which God hath prepared for them that love him.

I shall conclude with the words of St. Paul: "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth; that when Christ who is our life shall appear, then we may also appear with him in glory." Which God grant, for the sake of the same Jesus Christ.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. v. 15.

<sup>c</sup> Col. iii. 1.



## S E R M O N XLI.

THE DUTY OF IMPROVING THE TALENTS COMMITTED  
TO OUR TRUST.

LUKE xii. 48.

*For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.<sup>f</sup>*

THESE words of Christ were designed to make us all very serious and concerned, for the account which we must one day give of the talents we have received, and for the opportunities he has afforded us of *knowing* and of *doing* our duty.

“I believe that Jesus Christ shall come from heaven to judge the quick and the dead, and to render to every man according to his works done in the body.”—This is what every Christian professes to believe: But is it possible for any Christian, who leads a careless life, to say this, and not to be extremely concerned for the judgment that is then like to pass upon him, and for what must follow *that sentence*? The generality of Christians must certainly lie under some *sad delusion*, who live in a neglect of the duties of Christianity, and die without fearing any danger.

If one seriously considers what this delusion is, it will appear to be this,—*That most Christians do hope that they have not so much to answer for as really they have.*

I have made choice of these words of our Saviour, to convince you, that we have, *every soul of us*, more to answer for than we are generally aware of; *that we have, all of us, received much, and much will be required of us.*

I know this will hardly be believed; and one must take some pains to convince Christians that it is really true, and that their salvation depends upon it.

I am not now speaking of those to whom God has given excellent parts and understandings, great opportunities of doing good, time to spare, and abilities to learn and to know a great deal:—Nobody questions but such persons have a great deal indeed to answer for.—But that which I would have you convinced of is *this*; that such as are apt to think themselves least accountable will have *much* to answer for, even more than they generally think of.

Is it *knowledge* you want? Do not deceive yourself; you know things as hard to be

understood as the things which concern your salvation. Without religion no man must hope to be saved; every man, therefore, is *capable* of knowing as much as God will expect from him, provided he be really desirous to know his duty.

Is it *time* you want? You will not say so, when you consider, that religion is the work of the heart, more than of the body; and that a man may be very religious, doing his duty, pleasing God, at the same time that he is about his worldly business.

Is it the want of *a will* you complain of? Be assured of it, that you may have it for asking, if you are sensible of your want, and beg of God to give you a will to be concerned for your soul.

And if it be the *weakness of your resolutions*, and the *corruption of your nature*, that you are afraid and complain of, remember, that the very moment you give yourself to God, he has bound himself to assist you by an all-sufficient grace.

In short, every Christian living knows enough to make him very serious, and concerned for what may come hereafter: Every Christian who is thus concerned for his soul, *does* or *may* know, what God requires of him in order to his salvation: And every Christian, who knows this, is bound, at the peril of his soul, to look to himself, lest by his own negligence he be miserable for ever.

Every man, even the most ignorant, knows that he must die, and that in a short time. Every Christian knows that this life is only a state of trial, and that as we behave ourselves well or ill here, we shall be happy or miserable in another life.

What our behaviour ought to be, in order to our being for ever happy when we die, every Christian *does* or *may* know, if it be not plainly his own fault.

He knows, for example, let him be never so unlearned, that a good and holy God will always be best pleased with good and holy men, and good actions; and that wicked

<sup>f</sup> See Matth. xxv. 23. Acts xvii. 30. John ix. 41. xvi. 24. Rom. i. 22. James i. 5. iv. 17.



men will only be fit company for wicked spirits like themselves.

He cannot but know, that if God sees every thing that is done under the sun, he cannot hope to hide any evil action from God; and this will hinder him from doing any ill thing whatever, if he does not stifle his knowledge. And this knowledge will make him strive to do what he believes will will please God, because he knows that God, who sees him, will one day reward his piety.

The most ignorant Christian feels the corruption of his own heart, and he knows that he cannot, of himself, mend his own nature; but then God has promised and *will* give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him;—the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the Spirit of knowledge, true godliness, and holy fear, —*to lead them in the knowledge and obedience of his Word, that in the end they may obtain everlasting life.*

Every Christian, knowing this, will be without excuse, who does not most earnestly beg of God to give him this holy Spirit; and who is not very careful not to grieve him, and drive him away by any evil deeds.

Every man who knows, (and who does not?) that he has done a thousand things to offend and provoke God, will be glad to know, whether, and upon what terms, God will pardon and restore him to his favour. And every Christian who is thus concerned, will be desirous to know what he must answer for.

Now; that we may be as particular as possible upon a subject of so great concern, and be better prepared to answer our King and Judge *at that day*; I will set before you, in one short view, what will most certainly be required of every soul of us, even of the most ignorant and unlearned.

It will, in the first place, be required of every Christian, that he has given entire credit to the word and will of God, contained in the holy Scriptures; because these Scriptures have been confirmed and established by undoubted miracles, and have been received in all the Christian world.

And because these Scriptures were written by the direction of the Spirit of God, and cannot be understood or received but by the assistance of that Spirit by which they were written, it is our duty, and it will be required of us, that we have prayed to God for a true understanding of the same.

The first and great design of these Scriptures being to establish us in the true faith, “without which it is impossible to please God,” it will be required of us that we have received the truths contained in them

with the simplicity of children, that is, with submission, without questioning the wisdom of God in giving them, his authority, or his goodness, however hard they appear to be to our reason or understanding.

Especially it will be required of us, that having plainly seen the *wisdom*, the *power*, the *justice*, and the *goodness* of God, manifested in these Scriptures, we shall severely answer for it, if we behave not ourselves accordingly: That is, If we do not fear to offend this great and just God; if we do not live as in his sight; if we do not *depend* upon his *word*, his *truth*, and *promises*, and *fear* his *threatenings*; if we not honour his holy name, and serve him faithfully all our days; we shall be plainly without excuse, and shall dearly pay for it.

And then, forasmuch as these holy Scriptures assure us, that there is no salvation for any man living, (every one having sinned, and come short of the glory of God) unless his peace be made with God by Jesus Christ, it will be required of every Christian, that he lay hold of and close with this mercy, as he hopes to escape the wrath of God; that is, that he endeavour (according to the capacity which God has given him) that he endeavour to understand the *manner*, and the *conditions* of our redemption by Jesus Christ. For example: That the Son of God took our nature upon him, that he might, in our nature, suffer what we ought to suffer;—“that God laid on him the iniquities of us all;”—and that he hath obtained everlasting redemption for all them that obey him.

It will therefore be required of every soul of us, that we endeavour to obey his laws, and follow his example; that is, to do what we believe Jesus Christ would have us to do, and what we believe he himself would have done, were he in our place and circumstances. Particularly, it will be required of us, that we set before our eyes his *sufferings*, his *humility*, his *patience*, his *charity*, his *submission to the will of God*, and endeavour to imitate them; that we give entire credit to all that God hath made known to us by his Son, and especially this important truth,—That we must all appear before his judgment-seat; by whose righteous sentence, “they that have done good shall go into everlasting life, and “they that have done evil,” and have not repented them of the evil they have done, “shall go into everlasting misery.” It will, I say, be required, that we live like people who profess to believe all this, and that we be careful of our *thoughts*, *words*, and *actions*, which must then be judged.

And forasmuch as in baptism we are dedicated to the Holy Ghost, that he may sanctify



sanctify our nature, enlighten our understandings, and give us a power to do what God has commanded us; it will be required of us, that we have not grieved that Holy Spirit, nor driven him from us by our evil deeds, or by continuing in any known sin.

And this Holy Spirit having made known to us, "That God added to his church daily," that is, from time to time, "such as should be saved," it will be required of every man, as he hopes to be saved, that, by a righteous baptism, he be a member of Christ's Holy Catholick Church, in order to be a partaker of all its blessed privileges.

And it being to the governors and pastors of this church that Jesus Christ has made this sure promise,<sup>a</sup> "Lo! I am with you always, even unto the end of the world;" that is, to direct them, and bless those whom they bless in his name; it will be strictly required of every member of this society, that he attend to the word preached by them; highly value their prayers and blessing, and submit to the authority of Jesus Christ in his Ministers.

Every Christian who professes to believe the COMMUNION OF SAINTS, it will be required of him, that he has had a concern, a fellow-feeling, for all Christians; such as there should be amongst the members of the same body; that he has communicated his talents, whether of *wisdom*, or *riches*, or *power*, to others, in order to make the whole body of Christ as happy as may be.

And, forasmuch as Jesus Christ has commanded, "that Repentance and Remission of Sins should be preached in his name;" that is, repentance on man's part, and remission of sins on the part of God; every Christian will sadly suffer for it, if this goodness of God has not led him to repentance,—has not put him upon begging of God the grace of repentance, even that repentance to which God has promised mercy and pardon.

There is not a Christian so ignorant, who does not believe and confess this truth, "That the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation."<sup>b</sup> And will any Christian flatter himself, that this hour will not make a prodigious difference betwixt good and bad livers?

Is there a Christian so ignorant or unlearned as not to know, that now is the time in which we are to chuse where, and what, we are to be to all eternity? And will it not be required of every Christian who knows this, that he did not set his heart

upon a world which he was so soon to leave; and that he has laid up his treasure in heaven, where he did hope to live for ever?

These, good Christians, are all truths which we could not have known, had not God revealed them unto us; but now we *do* know them, you see plainly how much depends upon our living as becomes people to whom such things are revealed; that is, that we obey the laws which God has given us to walk by, and that we do not do what he has forbidden, upon pain of his everlasting displeasure.

But how shall we know this? say the ignorant and unlearned;—sure much will not be required of us, to whom so little knowledge, so few talents, are given!

Why now, the most unlearned Christian, who flatters himself with these hopes, that little will be required of him, will be condemned of his own conscience, (as well as by his great Judge) when he sees that the duties which he is commanded, and the things forbidden him, are in themselves *necessary, reasonable, and easily* known; and, (what is our great happiness and comfort) when he knows that we shall have all necessary assistance for asking, and that a sincere endeavour of doing what God has commanded will be accepted instead of a perfect obedience.

Will it not then, do we think, be required of every Christian, That he make the law of God the rule of his life;—that he love and fear God above all things; depend upon his providence; worship him with reverence; never take his name in vain;—that he abhor all manner of oaths, except when called before a Magistrate, and then to speak the truth, as he hopes the Lord, who knows it, will hold him guiltless.

Does not every Christian know, and will it not be required of him, that he has conscientiously observed the Lord's day, to keep it holy,—by laying aside all business or pleasures which may divert the mind from serving God;—by going to the place of public worship, where God is *acknowledged, honoured, and prayed to?*

Are not children taught from their very infancy, and will it not be required of them, that they have honoured their parents? And do they not know the meaning of this: That they are to obey them in all lawful things;—that they are not to grieve them, by any stubborn or evil course of life;—and that they are to assist them, if ever they should stand in need of their help?

And do not all parents know their duty? And they will severely answer for it, if they have not brought up their children in the fear

<sup>a</sup> Matth. xxviii. 20.

<sup>b</sup> John v. 28.



fear of God;—if they have not taken care to have them instructed;—if they have not set them a good example;—if they have not corrected them when they have done amiss;—and if they have not constantly prayed for them.

Will the meanest subject have it to say, that he did not know that it was his duty to obey, and that disobedience and rebellion were grievous sins, for which he was to answer?

Need any servant be told, that he has a master in heaven, to whom he will, one day, be accountable for his fidelity to his earthly master;—that if he has been an *eye servant*, that if he has wasted his master's goods or suffered others to do so, that it will be required at his hands?

And the same Lord and Judge of the world will require it of the master, that he hath been just and kind to, and careful of his servants, *there being with God no respect of persons*.

The most *ignorant* knows, as well as the most *learned*, that God will require it of him, if he does any violence or hurt to his neighbour, if he wishes any man's death, if he takes pleasure in the calamities that befall other men, if he is inhuman and hard-hearted.

And they that know, (and who is there that does not?) that they themselves shall stand in need of pardon from God, cannot but conclude that, if they do not forgive others, God will not forgive them at the great day.

*Whoredom, adultery, and all sins of uncleanness*, are so contrary to the notion which every body has of heaven, and the happiness we there expect, that the most ignorant Christian *cannot, dare not* hope for any favour from God, who has been so unhappy as to fall into these sins, and has not bitterly repented him of his folly.

*Drunkenness, intemperance, and an idle life*, because they send men out of the world sooner than God and nature designed; God has therefore strictly forbidden these things, and will therefore strictly require it of all Christians if they do not obey his commands.

Who will say, that we have not received a mighty blessing, in having the will and laws of God, and the way of life, made known to us, after so plain a manner, that as the Prophet speaks,<sup>1</sup> “The way-faring men, though fools, shall not err therein?” And will not much be required of every Christian man, who has these helps to salvation, and will not make use of them?

<sup>1</sup> Isaiah xxxv. 8.

Will any Christian say, that the things which are commanded are too hard for him to observe, who confesseth, that “with God all things are possible,” and who knows that God has promised all necessary assistance to them that sincerely pray for it? And what will any Christian have to say for himself, who hath such encouragement *to pray to God*, and yet neglects to do it; or does it after such a manner as shews plainly, that he is very indifferent whether God *grants* or *denies* him his petitions.

Christians confess, that the *Laws of God* are *holy, just, and good*, and that they are designed purely for *our good*; they readily confess their own inability, without the special grace of God, to keep these laws, and yet they will not ask this grace as they should do.—Will not such have a great deal to answer for?

And because the most ignorant person may not have it to say for himself, *that he knows not how to pray*, our Lord has given us a most perfect Form of Prayer, which we may use without fear of praying amiss, provided our hearts be well-disposed; that is, if we are truly sensible of our sad condition, and that we want God's help, and that we resolve to do what he has commanded to the best of our power.

Will it not then, do we suppose, will it not be required of every Christian, that he has let no day of his life pass without praying to God for himself, and for all Christians, as that holy Prayer directs we should do? That we pray for pardon, for grace, for God's protection and blessing upon ourselves, upon our neighbours, upon our children, upon our families, and upon our labours.

Will it not be required of every Christian, that he has given God thanks *daily*, for the blessings he has daily received from his bounty; for the means of grace; for the dangers he has escaped, whether ghostly or bodily; for success in his labours, and for the continuance of his life?

Lastly; will it not be required of every Christian, who pretends to love God, that he has prayed daily, that God may be honoured and glorified by the good lives of Christians; that God would set up his kingdom in all the world, and in all our hearts; that we may close with the will of God whenever it is made known to us?

This, we must say again, will be required of the most unlearned Christian, who can but say the Lord's Prayer, (and who will, for very shame, say that he cannot?) it will be required of him, that he has devoutly, and upon all occasions, begged of God to hear



hear him according to the full importance and meaning of that divine Prayer. And sad will be the account of every Christian, who has not done so to the best of his understanding and power!

To proceed:—God has appointed *certain Ordinances*, as most sure means of conveying *pardon* to sinners, *grace* to such as sincerely desire it, and *salvation* to all who devoutly close with them. These ordinances God has put into the hands of his Ministers, to be dispensed to all such as shall be religiously disposed to receive them.—Very much, therefore, will be required of every man, who shall slight or neglect such means of salvation, which are designed by God to admit us into, and to keep us in his favour.

By *Baptism* we are admitted into the church of Christ; and by that Sacrament we have a right to all the blessings and promises of the Gospel. And when, through infirmity, through temptation, or for want of due care, we have broken the covenant of our God, he has in great mercy appointed another Sacrament, whereby we may be restored to his favour upon our true repentance.

What will any Christian have to say for himself at the great day, who, having been dedicated to God in baptism, has taken no care to live as became the holy profession he then made of continuing Christ's faithful servant unto his life's end?

What will those parents have to answer for, who have taken no care to have their children instructed in the faith and fear of God;—who have taken more care of their bodies than of their souls;—and by doing so, have exposed both their souls and bodies to eternal destruction?

And can we imagine, that it will not be required of all persons that are come to years of discretion, and see the sin and the dangers they are exposed to, if they did not take upon themselves the covenant made for them in baptism, and thereby secure a greater portion of the Spirit of God, to enable them to encounter the difficulties they had to struggle with?

And such will still have more to answer for, if, after they have taken upon themselves their baptismal vows, they fall into a careless or a wicked way of living.

Jesus Christ has given unto Christians one of the greatest pledges of his love, in the *Sacrament of the Lord's Supper*; in order to keep up the remembrance of his death, by which alone we obtain remission of our sins.\*

Will the most unlearned Christian say, that he cannot understand so plain an ordinance?

\* Luke xxii. 19.

Will the most employed say, that he has not time to observe so short a service? Will any man say, that he can be a true Christian without obeying so positive a command?

What then will be required of those Christians who have all their life long turned their back on the Lord's Table;—of those who go to the Lord's Table without a full purpose of forsaking those sins which cost Jesus Christ his life;—or of those who have purposed to lead a new, that is, a Christian life, and have taken the sacrament upon it, and yet have still returned unto a careless or a sinful way of living? God will most certainly require it of every one who has done so, and has not repented and amended before he is called to judgment.

In short, all these will be without excuse: Such as do not desire to know their duty; such as have taken no pains to understand the will of God, what will please and what will displease him; such as never beg of God to enlighten their minds with saving truth; and especially all such as hold the truth in unrighteousness, that is, who do not live up to that measure of light and strength which God has given them.

For this is a law of the Gospel given by Jesus Christ himself: "To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have more; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath;" that is, whoever hath received and improved any talent which God has given him, God will give him more; and he will take away from those that have not made a good use of his gifts, even what he had given them.

And this, God knows, is too often verified: and we see every day people who have been dedicated to God, been made partakers of his Holy Spirit, have been taught their duty, and have solemnly vowed to perform it; yet for want of care, and neglecting to improve these gifts of God, are become *wicked, dissolute, profane, hardened in sin, ignorant, fearless, and reprobate*.

Do not we know, that we are, every soul of us, of the same race, and make, and corrupt nature, with those unhappy people, whom we see and confess to be in the way of eternal ruin? And will it not be required of us, that we keep a strict *watch* over ourselves, lest we also fall into the snare and temptation of the Devil?

Do not we see men ruining themselves, souls and bodies, because they will not deny themselves the desires of their own hearts? And does not every body see, and confess, that the want of *thought and consideration* is the ruin of infinite souls?

Will it not, therefore, be required of every body who knows these things, if they



have not kept a watch over themselves, if they have not denied themselves, if they have not considered and laid to heart the things that belonged to their peace?

And when we are most serious and thoughtful, let every soul of us consider these few, but most important questions:—How much will be required of those Christians, who have the holy Scriptures in their hands, and do not profit by them;—who have the way of salvation plainly shewed them, and do not value it;—who know that God is to be feared above all things, and yet make no scruple to do every thing that they know will displease and provoke him;—who are instructed in the will of God, and regard it as nothing;—who are invited to ask, and they shall receive, and yet think it not worth their while;—or else ask such things as are not worthy of God to give, or safe for themselves to receive?

Let us ask again, what will be required of such as call themselves Christians, and cannot by their lives be known from Heathens? Who come before God without reverence, blaspheme his name without scruple, pay no regard to what peculiarly belongs to him;—who treat their neighbour with that contempt, or hatred, or injustice, or uncharitableness, or wrong, as if they never did hope to meet him in heaven;—and (which is the saddest delusion of all) who themselves hope to go to heaven, without any of those qualifications which God requires of all such as shall be admitted into that holy, that happy place? What will be required of such Christians? Our Saviour has given the answer in these dreadful words: “It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for such Christians.”

Good Christians, I have insisted upon these things, that I may raise in my own, and in all your hearts, a true value for the blessings which we have received from God; as also, a just concern for the account we must give, and the great hazard we run, if we shall, any of us, be so unhappy as to despise or abuse these mercies.

You have seen plainly what will be required of every soul of us, when we come before the tribunal of God;—That in receiving the Gospel, we have received *very much*, and that very much will be required of us. We have received the knowledge of God, and of ourselves, and our duty to both. To awaken in us a concern for our souls, we have received from God an account of what must come hereafter; how the souls of men are disposed of when they die, according as their works have been in the body, whether good or bad.

You have seen the delusion of those who flatter themselves that they have little to account for, having received little from God.

Whatever Heathens may say for themselves, *no Christian* can with truth say, that he has received little. Our Lord's answer, which he gave to the Jews,<sup>1</sup> will most surely be given to every Christian who shall plead *that* for himself: “If I had not come and spoken unto you, you had not had sin; but now you have no cloak (no excuse) for your sin.” No, not the meanest Christian: for the meanest Christian, the most unlearned, knows when he does amiss; when he does what will displease God; and when his conscience does not accuse him.

And let it not be wondered at, that Christians, who know what sin is, and what will be the end of it, do yet, in defiance of hell and damnation, go on in their sin, and live and die under the displeasure of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.—The Apostle has given us the true reason of this,<sup>2</sup> because, “When men know God, and glorify him not as God, God will give them up at last to a reprobate mind;” that is, to a mind void of judgment.

To conclude:—If we would lead a life worthy of the religion we profess, and of the hopes we have of being happy when we die, we must ever and anon remember the account we are to give for the talents we have received. We must remember it, so as upon all occasions to put it in practice; and we shall soon see the good effects of the practical belief of a judgment to come.

For example. Let us often say to ourselves,—God has given me life and health, that I may do good in my generation, and that, by doing so, I may become worthy of a better life hereafter: What then will become of me, if I spend this life in idleness, in luxury, in wickedness; if I shorten this life by intemperance; or spend it in sinful pleasures?

God has given me children; if I take no care to give them a Christian education, I shall be answerable for their damnation.

I have a plentiful estate, and more than enough for my own necessities; others are in want, and I regard it not: I shall certainly answer for this another day.

I am selling my inheritance, or spending that in rioting and drunkenness, which belongs to my wife and children. Do I believe there is a God, and that he will not require it of me?

I have more knowledge, and know my duty better, than my neighbours; why then I have more reason to fear, because more

<sup>1</sup> John xv. 21.<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 22.



will be required of me. He that has given me power over others, will make me feel his power over me, if I abuse the authority with which he has intrusted me.

I have time to spare, which others have not. What then? Have I a right to squander it in idleness and pleasures? Can I persuade myself that life and time were given me for that end?

Would Christians reason after some such way as this, concerning the judgment to come, and what will then be required of them, it would mightily change their lives, and the face of religion in the world.

But it must be thy grace, O God, which must make this change, and enable us to

improve all the talents which we have received.

Let us not then, good Christians, defer one moment to ask this grace of God, every one for himself, and for all Christian people. And that we may do it more earnestly, let us remember, that now is the time in which to prepare for the account we are to give, and to chuse where and what we are to be for ever.

May God fix these thoughts in all our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour of his name, and the salvation of our souls, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N XLII.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

THE DUTY AND ADVANTAGES OF RIGHTLY CONSIDERING  
THE SHORTNESS OF HUMAN LIFE.

P S A L M XC. 12.

*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.\**

THE plain meaning of these words is *this*:—Teach us, O God, so effectually to consider how short our time is; how it passes away never to be recalled; and how much depends upon our making a good use of the time God is pleased to allow us; that we may live like people who have their senses about them, who consider what may come hereafter; that we may not squander away that time in vanity, which is designed to fit us for a blessed eternity; and that we may not be surprised by death, but be prepared (as wise men ought to be) for that which will come, whether they think of it or not.

The value of our time, the shortness and uncertainty of our lives, are things proper at any time to be recommended to people's serious consideration; but it would be unpardonable carelessness to let one year after another pass, without ever thinking of that which may be the last, without numbering the many years we have lived in comparison of the few which perhaps we have to live.

We have, within a few hours, seen the end of one year more; and God grant that the sins of this year may never rise up in judgment against us. We are just entering upon

the very beginning of another year, and God only knows which of us here present shall see the end of it: but this we know and are sure of, that either before the end of this year, or before many years are at an end, we, and all men now living, shall be in another world; and in an endless state either of happiness or misery.

Whether it does not much concern us to think of that world, and to make some preparations for it, I must leave you to judge, after I have laid before you a few things to be seriously thought of. Such are these following:—

*First*; That our days are few. But that,

*Secondly*; they are sufficient, if we are wise enough to make use of them.

*Thirdly*; That the end of them is unknown to us, and uncertain.

And *lastly*, That it is our wisdom to consider this, for that our eternal welfare depends upon it.

The consideration of these particulars may be of great use to us all.

To those who are truly concerned for the happiness of another life, it will be matter

\* See 2 Cor. vii. 2. 1 Pet. i. 17. Col. iv. 5. James iv. 14. Pl. xc. 9. Job. xiv. 5. 15.



of great comfort to consider, that short as their time is, yet, by the favour of God, it is long enough to fit them for everlasting happiness.

To those who have spent their time well, it will be great satisfaction to look back upon the years that are past, and to see that they have not quite mispent a life, which at best is but short.

And lastly, to those who have but seldom thought of these matters, it may be of use *to be put in mind*, that here is one year more of a short life passed over their heads; that the next for ought they know may be their last; and that it will be much for their advantage to begin a *new year* and a *new life* together.

To come therefore to the matter before us.

I. Let us consider *that our days are few, and therefore our time is precious.*

And is not this acknowledged by us all, and complained of as a great misfortune,—That our lives are short;—that we are no sooner come into the world, and to years of discretion, but we are immediately called upon to prepare to go out of it;—and that whether we are prepared or not, leave it we must, either with or against our wills? Yes; all this is acknowledged, and there would be no need of speaking of the shortness of our lives, but that *the greatest part of us* live as if we did not really believe what we so frequently acknowledge and complain of.

It would not become one (who himself has too many) to expose the infirmities of mankind; but it is necessary that we should not deceive ourselves, while we pretend to set a value upon that which in truth we do not regard.

If a man is very much concerned to prolong his life; if he spares no money, neglects no advice, consults his friends and physicians, and all this to add a few days to the number of his years; all this would look as if we did really value our time, and think it so short, that all cost and pains are too little that are bestowed upon prolonging it to its utmost period.

But do men indeed count their time precious? That will best be seen by considering how they use it while they have it: for if a man who takes great care of himself in the time of sickness, as soon as he recovers, shall run into new disorders;—if a man, while he is under the apprehensions of death, laments the shortness of his days, as having but a few to spend to any good purposes;—if such a person, when he is out of such fears and danger, shall live at all adventures,

and return again to his follies, it is a sign that he values a long life, not for any wise purposes, but to spend it upon his lusts.

Thus the worldling and covetous man complains of the shortness of life, because he has but a few years to get a great estate in. The drunkard thinks that time passes away, and that death is hastening on to interrupt his pleasures. And even those that are now careless, and have so much time upon their hands that they do not know how to spend it, will one day think it very short, when they come to consider how little use they may have of it.

And now you see the reason why men call time precious, and think life very short:—Not that they would make good use of it, were it ten times as long; but that they might have more time,—One to idle and faunter away his life in vanity and trifles;—another to leave a greater estate than a blessing to his posterity;—another would have more time that he may spend it upon his lusts. Some wish a long life, that they may enjoy the estates their ancestors have left them;—others that they may spend them, and leave none to their posterity. Those that are in easy circumstances think life too short, and desire to live longer, that they may have all the good that this world can afford;—and those that are poor and in want, would live longer to see an end of their miseries, and a change for the better.

In short; all agree in this,—That our days are few, and our time precious; and but too few consider the true end of life, or resolve to make the best use of so precious a thing.

If our days were so many that we could not number them, a man would have some excuse, though he should fling some of them away upon vanity and nothing; but when he that can but count three-score and ten, or four-score, can number the years of the longest life, it should not seem to be great wisdom to lose much of our time without considering what may come hereafter.

If our days are but a span long, we may better see to the end of them; and it is unpardonable not to consider our latter end when we are complaining of it, as coming too fast upon us.

It was, perhaps, the long lives of those before the flood that made them so wicked as to deserve to be destroyed by a general deluge. They reckoned upon four or five hundred years at least, and death at such a distance did not afflict them with what must follow: They kept far from them the evil day, till at last they forgot that such a time was ever to come, and this made them secure



cure and wicked beyond example. But for us to know and confess that our days are few, and that we are, within a very short space of time, to leave this world, and to give an account of what we have done here, and yet to have no more concern upon our spirits than if we were never to die, is somewhat unaccountable: And if we complain of the shortness of our lives, and yet make no better use of them, we shall complain without pity, and perish without relief.

After all, our time is truly short: We ought to know this, and to consider it seriously, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;—that we may in this our day know the things that belong unto our peace, lest they be for ever after hid from us.

Even they that are *young* ought to know this, for the days will come in which they will have a nearer sight of death.

They that are *in health* ought not to forget it, for ere long sickness and death will put them in mind of the folly of not thinking of them sooner.

But if the young and the healthful have reason to reflect upon the shortness of life, much more reason have *they* to do so, with concern and thoughtfulness, who have spent much of their time in sin and folly, who are already in years, and have done nothing towards their errand into the world.

Those who are of a weak constitution ought to consider this in earnest; and they that are *old*, should ever have it in their thoughts.

They that have done little good ought to think the time short in which they are to make amends for their negligence; and they that have done much wrong may well fear the time short in which they may make restitution for the injury they have done.

In short; the days of our age, by the just appointment of God, are reduced to a narrow compass; but here is our comfort:—

II. *We have time sufficient for all the purposes of salvation, if we are wise enough to make good use of it:* And this takes away all just occasion of complaint.

We may want time for our pleasures; we may want time for our vices; but we shall not want time to work out our salvation, provided we spend not our time for that which will not profit us. For the same just God, who has made our age as it were a span long, has made our duty possible to be performed within that short space: And even where we want time to do what his mercy is pleased to allow of, there his goodness often accepts of the will for the deed.

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Our happiness in the next world is not to be measured by the time we spend in this. Many go to heaven out of the arms of the mother; many are delivered out of the snares of a sinful world, even as soon as they are come into the danger; many are taken away in the midst of their days, to practise the graces in heaven which they had begun on earth; and it may be, they are the fewest in number who leave this world in a good old age to take possession of the blessings of the next life.

In short; the ways of God are unsearchable, and the reasons of his providence past finding out. This only we know,—That our *happiness* is owing to his mere mercy in his Son Jesus Christ, which accepts of our obedience; and where that is wanting, of our sincere repentance. If he prolongs our days, it is because he expects we should make use of our time to his honour and our own greater good;—if he takes us away in the beginning of our days, it is because he has allowed us time sufficient for the work appointed us, that we may more devoutly adore the greatness of that mercy, which rewards his creatures according to his own great goodness, not according to their deservings.

Thus all ages of men taste the goodness of the Lord; all ages are capable of his mercy; and if there are many who come short of eternal happiness, it is not for want of time to do their duty, but for want of a will to perform it: Either they are in love with wickedness, and will not leave it for the hopes of heaven; or they purpose to repent some time or other, and continue thus to purpose, and repent not, till death calls them unawares to judgment; or they have deceived themselves, and have depended upon such righteousness as God will not accept of.

For these, and such reasons as these, men may be shut out of the kingdom of heaven, but not for want of time sufficient in which to work out their salvation.

Our blessed Saviour has discovered to us a new and living way by which we may be reconciled unto God, and prepared for heaven. It is *he* who has made known to us,—That there is joy in heaven for repenting sinners;—that charity will cover a multitude of sins;—that hearty repentance, and true faith, are sometimes accepted instead of a long obedience;—that a sinful prodigal, returning to his duty, has been received into favour, and treated as one who had never offended.

Now these are comfortable truths indeed; Truths they are that may be depended upon: and they are written for our admonition,

H h h

that



that men may at all times be encouraged to come unto God by Jesus Christ; "that all who are weary and heavy laden," with the burthen of their sins, may know where to find rest; and lastly, that none may perish but by their own wilful negligence: For, notwithstanding the goodness of God in accepting of our repentance, many there are that perish: amongst these, the greatest number, it is probable, are of such as put off their repentance from time to time, till at last they are prevented by death from bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

This is, no doubt of it, the ruin of many souls. To prevent which mischief, there is another circumstance of our life fit to be considered; namely,

III. *That the end of our days is unknown to us, and uncertain.*

It is true, our lives are in God's hands; nothing can befall us without his permission. But since the time when he will call us out of the world is altogether, as to us, uncertain; it is highly reasonable we should be prepared for God's good time, which, though it may not perhaps be the best for us, if we are not prepared for heaven, yet it will ever be the fittest to manifest the glory of God, and his justice upon those who are deaf to all the methods of his mercy.

He has not made known to us the day of our death,—That we, not knowing when he will call for us, may be ever prepared for his coming;—that we may, all our life long, live like men who know and believe that there is another world after this;—that this life is only in order to fit us for a much better; and that if we neglect the opportunity of making our peace with God while we are here, or defer the doing so till we are surprized by sickness and death, we do lose the only opportunity of securing our eternal welfare, and consequently are undone for ever.

In short; we know not when we shall die, whether this year or the next; but this we know, and ought to think seriously of it, that the only way to make the uncertainty of our life comfortable to us is this:—To consider that the year we are entering upon may be the last we have to live in this world; and since it may be so, to resolve, by God's grace, so to husband this short time, as that we may ourselves have comfortable thoughts of another life, and that those who are left behind may not have reason to grieve as men without hope.

To make this consideration of more use to us, pray let us remember, that all the time of our lives which is already past, and not spent in doing our duty, is utterly lost

to us. And this must needs be an astonishing thought to a man who has spent the greatest part of his life in vanity. "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth," is a most wholesome admonition; for he that spends his youth in idleness or vice, has no more younger years to spend in virtue and piety. He that has never thought of the good of his soul, till a few days before he comes to die, has but a few days in which to make his salvation sure.

We, whose duty it is to visit men in their last hours, can say, by experience, under what agonies men labour, who have not thought of these things until they have been ready to give up their accounts.

Well then; one of these two conditions every one of us will be in when we come to die,—(unless we die suddenly)—We shall either bewail our mispent days, and with great sorrow wish we had never been born; or we shall with comfort look back upon the time we have lived in the fear of God, and in obedience to his laws. Pray then let us consider, which of these conditions is fittest to be chosen by people that are in their perfect minds and senses: And, because every day, every year, that we mispend, is for ever lost to us, let us not choose to spend one year after another in doing nothing of that business for which we had our lives given and continued to us. Especially since in the last place,

IV. *Our eternal welfare depends upon this uncertain life.* And this is a thought that should make one very serious indeed.

If a man has made a foolish bargain, time and good husbandry, advice of friends, or experience, may set all straight again, and the injury may be repaired. If a man has through ill husbandry spent a great estate, he has this comfort at least, that he shall some time be freed from the shame and sense of his misfortunes: But what amends can be made, what arguments can be used, to comfort a man who has lived a careless, useless life, and is now going into eternity?

A few of those days which are past would be precious; but time is not to be purchased when we come to die; and for that reason it ought not to be squandered away and neglected while we have it continued to us.

Those that let one day after another pass over their heads without thinking what ill they have done, and what good they have to do, may have this small comfort,—that to lose a few days out of the number of their life, is not very material. Let it be so: But sure it is very material to lose one year after another, without thinking seriously of our errand into the world, without providing for



for a better world: And it is wisdom not to hazard our souls upon such uncertainties as are the number of our days and years, and the time of our stay here.

Thus you see what we pray for, when we beg of God to give us grace *to number our days*. It is, that we may soberly consider the shortness of our time, the uncertainty of our latter end, and that the greatest good or evil that can possibly befall us depends upon our making good or bad use of the present opportunity; and that, considering these things, we may apply our hearts unto wisdom;—that we may fear God, *which is the beginning of wisdom*;—that we may observe his laws, *which are the ways of wisdom*;—and that we may live to his glory and our own salvation, *which is the perfection of wisdom*.

This is that true wisdom which the Spirit of God recommends so much to us as the only thing which can make our years happy, and without which we cannot be happy though we should succeed in all our undertakings besides.

Blessed be God, that we that are here present have seen the end of this year, and are come even to the beginning of another; that we have not been cut off in the midst of our days; and especially, that we have not been surprised by death in the midst of our sins and unthoughtfulness.

Blessed be God, that we are yet of the number of those who have time and space for repentance and good works! The gracious God grant that we may value our days

as we ought to do; and that, if we live to the end of the approaching year, we may not have reason to repent that we have lived so much longer, or apprehend the anger of God, for what we shall have done!

To this end let us consider,—That the shortest life, by the grace of God, is long enough to gain heaven; and that the longest life is but a curse when we make use of it only to increase the number of our iniquities;—that though every one present should live to the end of another year, to the end of many years, yet still we are accountable for them;—and that it is no great blessing, whatever we think of it, to live many years, only to be more miserable at the last.

Let us, therefore, live like people that are truly convinced and persuaded of the truth of these things, that we may not be surprised in the midst of our sins. And these considerations, as serious as they are, will be so far from damping the pleasures of this season, that they will make our joys more grateful, and more lasting.

And in the doing of this great work, the good God send us a happy New Year!—Prosper Thou, O God, the work of our hands upon us: O prosper Thou our handy-work.

And God grant, that after the few days and years we have to live in this world, we may leave it for a better; where we may praise Thee to all eternity, for the time Thou hast afforded us here, in which to work out our salvation, and for all the favours Thou hast in mercy vouchsafed unto us.

## S E R M O N XLIII.

### THE GREAT DANGER OF NOT KNOWING THE DAY OF VISITATION.

LUKE XIX. 41, 42, 43, 44.

*And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it; saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side; and lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee: and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy Visitation.\**

I Must tell you, in the first place, that all these things came to pass exactly as our Lord foretold, within less than forty years after his death.

The Romans besieged the city of Jerusalem so close that not a man could escape; and after the most dreadful siege that ever was

heard of, they took it, destroying all before them, and not leaving one stone upon another of one of the finest cities and temples in the world.

Our Blessed Lord could not forbear weeping, because he foresaw that this would certainly come to pass, and because he saw that

\* See Ps. xxxix. 4. xc. 12. Mark xiii. 33. Luke xxi. 3. 1 Pet. ii. 12.



that people would not be persuaded, by any thing that he could say or do, to prevent it by a timely repentance. He knew this was *their day of grace*, and he saw they despised it, and that it would end in their destruction. And this made our compassionate Saviour bewail, with tears, the miseries they were bringing upon themselves, and upon their posterity.

And this should teach all Christians how to behave themselves on such occasions; namely, not to be pleased with and laugh at the sins of others, as people are but too apt to do, but rather to pity and bewail the blindness of sinners, who do not know the judgments they are preparing for themselves; and to beg of God to open their eyes, that they may see their error, and sad condition, before the day of grace is at an end.

And, God knows, we have great reason thus to mourn, whether we consider the general state of Christianity, or the wicked lives of particular Christians. For not to mention the *heresies*, the *divisions*, the *idolatry*, that is to be met with in many Christian churches; not to mention the sins of *whoredom*, *adultery*, *injustice*, *drunkenness*, and such like, which every body knows will shut men out of heaven; we need only consider the lives of very many Christians, who fear no danger, and yet live like heathens; we need only consider this, in order to excite our grief, and fetch tears from our eyes.

To see people, for instance, who profess to have here no abiding-place, yet setting up their rest upon earth, as if they were sure, as if they desired, never to leave it;—

To see Christians, who are bound by their profession to love one another, rejoicing and taking pleasure in the misery and ruin of each other;—

To hear people beg of God to forgive them *their* trespasses, as *they* are ready to forgive others, and at the same time resolving not to forgive the least offence against themselves without full satisfaction;—

To see the *rich* oppressing the *poor*, and the *poor* envying the *rich*, as if the *rich* were not accountable to God, nor the *poor* expected any amends in the next world for what they want in this;—

To see *parents* educating their children after such a manner as if they intended their eternal ruin; teaching them to love the world, instead of renouncing it; gratifying them in every thing that is vain and sinful, and suffering them to content themselves with a bare outward form of religion, without knowing any thing of its power, or of that “holiness without which no man must see the Lord;”—

To see *Pastors* as little concerned for the flocks committed to their charge, as if, in truth, they were so many beasts whose souls would die with their bodies, and for which they were never to give an account;—

In one word, to see the greatest part of Christians live without *faith*, without *hope*, without *charity*, without *fear*; that is, without any true religion;—to see them living at this rate, without apprehending any manner of danger, neglecting the *day of grace* which God has afforded them for their salvation, and never considering, *that the night cometh when no man can work*:—

Can any Christian see and consider all this, and where it must end, and not be moved with sorrow and compassion, as our Lord was, for the eternal miseries which unthoughtful Christians are bringing upon themselves? Can they forbear to mourn in secret, and beg of God to pity and cure these disorders, and the blindness of sinners, who do not see the danger of neglecting the *time of visitation*, and the *day of grace*?

It was this that moved our Lord's compassion for Jerusalem, *because she knew not the time of her visitation*, and because that was the occasion of her ruin. She *knew not*; that is, she *would not* know it. She would not see the sin that occasioned it; she would not believe the Prophets that foretold it; she would not receive the Son of God, who came to warn her of her approaching ruin, and who would, no doubt of it, have delivered her from it, would she have improved the means of salvation so mercifully afforded her:—for it was as easy for God to have saved that whole nation from destruction, as he did those few that believed, whom he delivered as by a miracle from that desolation which soon after followed.

Now, these things (good Christians) were written for our example, *that we may see the danger of not knowing the day of visitation*.

For that there is an appointed time, in which God offers grace to sinners, and an opportunity of working out their salvation; and that when *this* is neglected and past, sinners have nothing to expect but judgment without mercy; that *this* is so, is plain from this, and from many other instances, and parts of holy Scripture:—

“To-day, (saith the Psalmist<sup>p</sup>) to-day, if “if ye will hear his voice, harden not your “hearts:”

“Behold now (saith the Apostle<sup>p</sup>) is the “accepted time, now is the day of salvation. And, “Exhort one another daily while it “is called to-day;” that is, while the time of trial lasteth.

<sup>p</sup> Ps. xcvi. 8. <sup>q</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 2. <sup>r</sup> Heb. iii. 13.

“Ah,”



“Ah,” saith our Lord; that is, happy had it been for thee, “if thou hadst known, “even thou, in this day,” (of visitation) “the things that belong to thy peace! but “now they are hid from thine eyes;” that is, through thine own infidelity, thou hast provoked God to leave thee to thine own blindness, so that thou canst not see the *day of thy visitation*.

You see, brethren, how matters stand with us. We are all gone astray from God; he has appointed us *a time* in which to return to him; if we lose *this time*, we are most certainly undone. This is not what God desires, for he is not willing that any should perish; he therefore calls upon us to return to our duty, *he speaks to us once, yea twice, though we perceive it not.* He speaks to us by his *Word* and by his *Ministers*;—he speaks to us by his *mercies*, and by his *judgments*;—he lays us upon the bed of sickness;—he brings troubles upon us;—he takes from us our *children*, and our *goods*;—he suffers us to be *wronged*, and *persecuted*, and the like;—not that he takes any pleasure in the miseries of his creatures, but as Elihu, in the book of Job, observes, “All these “things worketh God oftentimes with “man,” for this end, “to bring back his “soul from the pit, that he may be en- “lightened with the light of the living;” that is, to open his eyes, that he may see the *time of his visitation*; and that he may lay hold of it, and prevent the miseries of the next world, to which these are not to be compared.

Thus the author of the book of Wisdom, [xii. 8.] speaking of the Canaanites, tells us how God spared them as men *capable of knowing his meaning*; not that he was unable to have destroyed them at once with cruel beasts, or even with the rough sword, but that executing his judgments by little and little, he gave them place for repentance.

And thus he deals with all mankind; and all that perish, perish through their own fault, and wilful blindness; they will not see the opportunities which God affords them of working out their salvation, till very often it is too late to make use of them.

But then this is purely our own fault. God forbid that we should imagine that he speaks so as not to be understood by *all* that are *disposed* to hear him. I will endeavour, therefore, to make you sensible how we come to be so *blind* as not to see the seasons in which God visits us.

And first; we are apt to call every thing that befalls us *mere chance*; whereas nothing happens to men, but by the order or permission of God; and every thing (if we

could be persuaded to consider and see it) is designed for our good; either to awaken us when we grow careless, or to instruct us when we know not our duty, or to punish us in this life, that we may not be punished in the next.—We should be blinder than the very Jews and Heathens, if we should not see and confess this.

“As I have done, so God has requited “me,” saith a Prince, when the conqueror cut off his thumbs and great toes.—“We “are verily guilty concerning our brother,” said the sons of Jacob, when God brought them into distress, “in that we saw the an- “guish of his soul, and we would not hear “him.”—They did not say, this trouble which we are all fallen into came by *chance*; nor did they say it was their *lot*, and their *destiny*, and not to be avoided; but they owned the hand of God in it, *his justice*, and *his mercy*, in punishing them *here*, rather than *hereafter*, and in opening *their eyes*, though it were by sharp medicines.

So just is that observation of the Wise Man, “Thou chastenest them by little and “little that offend, and warnest them by “putting them in remembrance wherein “they have offended, that leaving their “wickedness they may believe in Thee, O “Lord.”

But there is another cause of men’s blindness, and which makes them forget their errand in this world, and *the day of grace*: and this is, *a constant hurry of business, and success in it.*

It is utterly impossible to *love God*, or to desire to enjoy him, while we love the world with all our hearts. This is the true reason why so many neglect eternity, and never think of providing for it, till just as they are leaving the world. They are too much distracted to hear their compassionate Saviour asking them this question, “What will it “profit a man if he should gain the whole “world and lose his own soul?”

But if *business* is apt to blind us, much more will *success* in it. David confesseth this, and God’s mercy in opening his eyes:—“In my prosperity, I said, I shall never be “removed. Thou didst hide thy face, and “I was troubled.”

But that which above all things hinders our conversion, and blinds our eyes most effectually, is, *the want of humility*. It was *this* that hardened the Jews; they were *too wise* to be taught, even by the Son of God; they were *too righteous* to need repentance; they were too exact in lesser matters, to mind the great concerns of the law; in one word, they took some care of their outward

<sup>a</sup> Job. xxxiii. 14.

<sup>t</sup> Wisdom xii. 1.



actions and profession, but had little or no concern for the inward graces of the Spirit.

And, O God! is not this the case of too many Christians, who depend upon being in covenant with God, and called by the name of Christians, and, on that account only, secure from destruction? And yet this was the very case of the Jews, whose unhappy condition and blindness Jesus Christ laments with tears. They had Abraham for their father; they had the *covenant*, and the *law*, and the *promises*, and the *temple*, and the *sacrifices*; and what have we more? And yet for want of *humility*, and making a right use of all these mighty advantages, they became the most abandoned of all people.

And ought it not to humble us to consider how little we are better than they with all the advantages we are apt to boast of? We that know we are made for the everlasting possession of the heavenly Canaan, and yet never prepare for it with seriousness! We that are made for the fellowship of Angels, and yet can be content with the pleasures of beasts! We that have a time appointed us by God, in which to work out our salvation, with an assurance, that "when the night cometh no man can work;" and yet defer this mighty concern to the evening of our day! We that believe an everlasting life of happiness or misery after death, and yet never seriously consider which of the two may be our own portion! We that confess we are sinners, and yet live as if we had never offended God, and stand in no need of his pardon! We that are in danger every moment to be snatched away, and are sure, if we die in our sins unrepented of, to be made the scorn of devils, and yet to be as unconcerned as if the command of life were in our own hands!

Gracious God! that these considerations might awaken in us a deep sense of our unhappy state! that weighing the *shortness* and *uncertainty* of our time, the great work we have to do, the necessity of making our peace with God, the comfort of living to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance," and the danger of dying under thy displeasure, our hearts may be filled with godly fear; and that we may see, in this our day, the things which belong to our peace, lest they be for ever hid from our eyes.

But I would not, good Christians, only raise your fears and your passions, without instructing you how to turn them to good purposes. Our Lord himself has told us what to do when our hearts are filled with fears of what may become of us hereafter: "Watch and pray, (saith he) that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these

things. For ye know not when your Lord cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning. Take heed, therefore, lest your hearts be overcome with surfeiting and drunkenness, and the cares of this world, and that day overtake you unawares."

Why now, Christians, this is our case; *this is our day of Salvation*. I, and every one of you that now hear me, have it in our own power, by the grace of God, to be for ever happy. *This is our appointed time*, which would not be continued to us, but that God waits to be gracious. That we may not lose this opportunity, our first and great duty is, to *watch* and *pray*; to *watch* against *sin*, and to *pray* for *grace*; always remembering, that if we lead a *careless*, *useless*, *thoughtless* life, our sentence is already passed, with that of the slothful servant, who was commanded to watch, and did not: "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into outer darkness."

But how must we watch? Why; we must endeavour to have the *shortness* and *uncertainty* of our life ever in our thoughts; the good effects of which will be these:—

We shall make good use of our present time, *for who knows how short it may be?*

We shall take every opportunity of doing good, *for who knows whether ever we may have another?*

We shall be just in all our dealings, *for who would hazard his soul for what he must in a very short time leave behind him?*

We shall be moderate in our cares for the riches and conveniences of this life, *for what would it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

We shall be *sober* and *temperate*, lest that day should overtake us, as it has done many, when we have not our thoughts and senses about us.

We shall be *patient* under all the afflictions with which God shall think fit to exercise us, seeing plainly that these *cannot* last long.

We shall be charitable and merciful according to our power, as knowing assuredly that we are *laying up for ourselves a good foundation for the time to come*.

We shall *readily forgive* all that have offended or injured us; for why should we be enemies here, when in a very little time we hope to meet in Paradise, and be good friends *there* for ever?

In short; we shall always be *serious*, for so the thoughts of death will be apt to make us; always *devout*, for who can think of another life, and not passionately desire and pray that his portion may be with the blessed?

\* Mark xiii. 33. Luke xxi. 34.



blest? And by this means we shall make our lives *easy*, and our deaths *happy*.

But is all this care and watchfulness necessary for every one that hopes to be happy when he dies? Most certainly so. "What I say unto you," (saith our Lord) "I say unto all, *Watch*." And indeed, it cannot be otherwise. For how can we hope to go to the place of just men made perfect, but by following their steps; by becoming, in some measure, perfect as they were?

My meaning and the truth is this;—Before we leave this world, as ever we hope to go to a better, *our nature must be changed*; we must put on, as the Apostle speaks, *the new man*;" that is, we must endeavour by the grace of God to be restored to that integrity in which man was at first created, and which was lost at the Fall, by which we are become weak, sinful creatures. Our business in the world is to be restored to this condition again, that we may be fit for the company of Angels, and the souls of just men made perfect.

But how must this be done? Why, first, by forsaking every evil way; then, by watching, and standing against all temptations to sin, which we are sure every day to meet with;—by denying our own desires, which would lead us to dishonour God;—and, because we have nothing in ourselves to trust unto, by earnestly and daily begging of God to give us new *hearts*, new *desires*, and greater *strength*, and better *resolutions*, than we have by nature;—by endeavouring every day more than other, to wean our affections from the things of this world;—by thinking often of the *shortness* of this life, and of the *eternity* of the next, of the joys of heaven, and of the pains of hell. Lastly; by exercising ourselves in acts of *piety* and *charity*, that we may thereby recommend ourselves to God for greater degrees of grace here, and for a favourable sentence at the day of judgment.

So that you see, good Christians, we have no reason to *despair*: While we are alive, we have reason to hope that God has not forsaken us for ever. But then let us, like men awake and in their senses, resolve to *redeem the time* we have lost, and which was granted to us for working out our salvation; remembering, that when once time is lost, it can never be recovered, if we had the world to give for it. And let us not flatter our hearts with thinking, that because the day of judgment may be a great way off, that therefore we are a great way from danger; for it is undoubtedly true and plain from the Sacred Scriptures, that as soon as ever we die, the souls of good men are *by the Angels* car-

ried into Paradise, a place of peace, rest, and happiness; for so was the soul of Lazarus, and so was that of the penitent thief:—On the other hand, the souls of wicked men are carried to a place of misery, as was that of the rich man:—Both the one and the other to be kept either in *peace*, or in *misery*, unto the judgment of the great day.

Well then, what I have hitherto said comes to this:—This short life is our *appointed day*, in which to work out our salvation; "the night"—that is, death—"cometh, when no man can work." If death overtake us before we have prepared ourselves for it, we are for ever undone. The time of our death is hid from us, that we may be always thinking of it, always preparing for it. That we may not forget the *only thing* for which we came into the world, God has hitherto spared us, and puts us in mind of our *latter end* by a thousand instances. Some are every day going out of the world, of all ages and conditions, by all manner of ways, by sudden and untimely deaths;—some young;—some in their full age and strength;—and much the fewest in a good old age. Nay, every day that we come to the House of God, we tread upon the *graves* of those that have already received their doom, whose souls are all confined to their proper places of happiness or misery.—And will not this affect our hearts? I am sure it ought, and make us seriously think within ourselves, that very, very soon, this *must* be the case of every one of us here present.

Consider what it was that made our Lord to weep over Jerusalem; why, the temporal calamities he saw the stubborn Jews were bringing upon their own heads: He saw how their city would be laid in ashes, how they themselves would be starved with famine, how that at last they would all be murdered, or sold for slaves. But what is all this to the misery of being for ever separated from God; of having our portion with evil spirits, which are kept in chains and darkness unto the judgment of the great day; and who at that day must hear these dreadful words, "Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," &c.

Why now, by brethren, the same Spirit which foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem, and which came exactly to pass; the same mouth which forewarned them, has also given us warning of what will befall us when we die, if we are not renewed in the spirit of our mind while we live: It is therefore necessary, very necessary, that these truths should be often sounded in our ears; forasmuch as a spirit of slumber has seized upon the world, and men live as if they were never to die, or as if after death they were



were to have no being. It was just so with the Jews before their final destruction. And do not think, my brethren, that these things are nothing to us; the frequent *admonitions* they had, their *blindness*, their *obstinacy*, their *punishment*, are all written for the admonition of every private Christian, who must expect the *same* fate, if he takes the *same* way to deserve it.

To conclude:—The consideration of these things very much concerns every one of us here present.

It concerns myself, lest, when I have preached them to you, I myself, as the Apostle speaks, “should be a cast-away.”

It concerns the very *youngest persons* that hear me, that they may beware of falling into a wicked course of life, which shall *harden* their hearts, and *blind* their eyes, and *grieve* the Holy Spirit of God by which they were sanctified.

It concerns such as are *in health*, and in the prime of their years, lest sickness, calamities, and death, should come upon them unawares.

And nobody doubts but that it concerns such as are *old*, for *their* appointed time cannot be very long.

As for such as are *ignorant* of their duty, and know not how to walk, and to please God, it concerns them to look out for better instruction, lest they pass their days in ignorance, and die in their sin.

For such as *hold the truth in unrighteousness*; that is, who *believe* and *know* their duty, and yet live like heathens that know not God, it concerns such to look about them, lest in a very short time they have their portion with Devils, who believe as well as they, but yet for their rebellion tremble under the dreadful wrath of God.

Lastly; it concerns every body, even the very best of us, to take notice, that *this is the day of visitation*.

God VISITS every one of us: To such as are ignorant he sends *instruction* by his Ministers; to such as are *careless*, he sends his *judgments* to awaken them; to such as are at *ease*, he sends *calamities*; and to *wean our affections from this life*, he often visits us with sickness.

He visits us by his *Holy Spirit*. Such as *fear* him, and are dejected, he *comforts* them; such as are *weak*, and *pray* to him for help, *them* he strengthens; to such as have made good use of the graces he has bestowed upon them, to them he gives more grace; and from them that go on to abuse his mercies, he takes away what before he had given them.

In one word, in this instance of the Jews, every Christian may see his own destiny.—

They had all the favours shewed them that their hearts could desire, and so have all Christians;—they were chastised when they forgot God, and so are we;—they were told of, and threatened with approaching judgments, and yet very few regarded, till they came upon them like a flood. And is not this the case of too many Christians, who have felt the punishment of their sins before they would be persuaded to believe that any such thing would ever befall them?

What now can I add more, than only to desire every one of you, to consider with me, that *this day of visitation*, *this day of grace*, will have an end, and *that very soon*, with every one of us here present: that therefore it is our interest and concern, to think of what must follow; namely, first, *Death*; secondly, *Judgment*; then either *Hell* or *Heaven*.

These are called the FOUR LAST THINGS. And the serious consideration of these I would leave upon your spirits; beseeching God of his mercy to possess all our souls with a lively sense of these important things, and with the great concern they ought to be to us; that the thoughts of *Death* may mortify in us all pride and vanity, all covetousness and worldly-mindedness, all carnal security and fondness for this life, and oblige us to a strict watchfulness while we continue in this state of temptation and trial;—that the consideration of a *judgment* to come may oblige us all to a strict holiness, and may make us careful of our *thoughts*, *designs*, *words*, and *actions*, which must all then come to light and be tried.

Let this oblige us, therefore, to *try*, to *examine*, and to *judge* ourselves, that we may not be condemned of the Lord, when he cometh to judge the world in righteousness.

And if the difficulties of an holy life affright us; if the commands of Jesus Christ and the example he has set us, seem hard to flesh and blood; then let us seriously consider, whether is easier to serve God now, or to *dwell with everlasting burnings* hereafter?

Lastly; let us consider the very happy estate of all such as are dead in peace, and in the favour of God; and let the constant expectation of that happy day that shall let us into Paradise, and a faith and hope full of immortality, sweeten all the troubles of this mortal life, and raise our sense and value for the joys of heaven so high, that we may no longer doat upon the short appearances of happiness we meet with here.

O Thou who hast redeemed us with thy precious blood, make us so to behave ourselves here, that we may be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting!

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON



## S E R M O N XLIV.

## THE GREAT DUTY OF INSTRUCTING THE IGNORANT.

MARK iv. 28.

*The Earth bringeth forth Fruit of herself, first the Blade, then the Ear, after that the full Corn in the Ear.*

**T**HOUGH this parable is *not* particularly explained, and applied by Christ himself, as many of his parables are; yet we easily gather what the design of it is, from other places of Scripture: "He that soweth the seed is the Son of Man: The Ground is the World: The Harvest is the End of the world: The Reapers are the Angels." Thus much is plain from St. Matthew xiii. 37, &c. Therefore, the meaning of these words is this:

The Son of *Man*, who is also the Son of *God*, having planted the Gospel in the world, and declared it to be the way of salvation; having caused it to increase, and established it by ways extraordinary, and far exceeding the powers of art, or nature, or any power but that of God; he did afterwards leave it to *subsist*, to *increase*, to *prosper*, to *come to perfection*, by the ordinary means he had appointed, and by the ordinary assistance of his grace and providence. For so did the Husbandman in the parable: After he had manured and wrought his ground; after he had sown it, and done *his* part, he leaves it in the hand of Providence, not doubting but he *shall* (in God's good time) see the fruit of his labour. In the mean time, he follows his other business, "he sleeps and rises night and day," and still he observes an orderly increase; "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."

It is true, all this is done *he knows not how*; but done he finds it to his comfort. And though weeds and tares in abundance spring up amongst the corn, to his great trouble and discouragement, yet, when the harvest shall come, it will be found that his labour was not in vain.

Now *this parable*, thus explained, furnisheth us with several *useful observations* suitable to the *occasion* for which I have chosen them. Such are these following:

First; *That the promoting the Kingdom of God, or the setting forward the design of the Gospel, is very consistent with the ordinary business of life.*—When the Husbandman has

cast his seed into the ground, he finds himself obliged to take care of a great many things besides; and yet his crop prospers as much as if he minded nothing else but that.

Secondly; *That in promoting the Kingdom of God, we ought to be satisfied with the ordinances of Christ, and not be ever and anon looking for, and depending upon extraordinary appearances in our favour.*—When the corn is sown, it is left to the ordinary providence and blessing of God, who gives an increase according to the goodness of the ground, and the means made use of to improve it.

Thirdly; *That such as are any way engaged in promoting the Kingdom of God, ought not to be discouraged because they do not immediately see the fruit of their labours.*—The seed springs and grows up *we know not how*; and so does the Kingdom of God.

Lastly; *A time will come when we shall certainly reap where we have sown.*—There will be an harvest, and then we shall find that our labour has not been in vain in the Lord.

I. To begin with the *first* of these observations;—*That the promoting the Kingdom of God is very consistent with the ordinary business of life.*

A man may, besides the ordinary duties of Christianity, do a great deal towards promoting the glory of God, and the salvation of men, and yet his worldly affairs need not suffer by his being so employed.

There are two great mistakes, which people are apt to run into, and which ought to be rectified.

Some are ready to conclude, that all the time which is not spent in devotion (though to the hindrance of their necessary worldly concerns) is in a manner lost. It is this which fills the monasteries in the church of Rome; people vainly imagining, that it is more meritorious to spend the greatest part of their time in holy exercises, of prayers and praises to God, than to labour for and to relieve the poor;—to strive with, and to



overcome the temptations of an evil world, (which is one great part of our business in it:)—And yet our blessed Lord assures us, that the sentence at the last day will, in a more especial manner, proceed upon such questions as these: Whom have you visited in their affliction? Whom have you fed, and clothed, and comforted?—How they that retire out of the world, and get out of the sight of these miserable objects—how *they* can answer such questions to their comfort, cannot well be imagined.

But there are others who run into quite a contrary mistake; who fancy, that religion, and special acts of piety, belong to the Clergy only,—that it would be the very ruin of people of business, to be exact in their devotions, to be solicitous for the wants and necessities of the poor, to be concerned to have the ignorant instructed, or the wicked reclaimed.

Now, both these are much in the wrong.

All people are plainly under an obligation to pray to God, and to praise him for his mercies;—all people are bound, by their religion, to be helpful to their fellow-creatures that are in want, or misery;—and lastly, all people are bound in duty to provide for themselves and families. And yet these are duties which in their turns may all be performed, and very acceptably, to Almighty God. Blessed be God, that we have an argument and proof of this, so ready at hand.

You that are engaged in this good work, which you have desired me to recommend,\* Do *you* find, by experience, that having undertaken a charity which has *some* care and trouble attending it, do *you* find, that it straitens you in your time;—that it obliges you to neglect your callings or families;—that your worldly business succeeds worse;—or that, upon the whole, you are sufferers for having concerned yourselves in these charities?

One may be sure it is quite otherwise, because that neither the number nor the importunity of those that expect relief, nor the disappointments you must needs meet with in carrying on a work of this nature, have yet been able to discourage you after so many years' experience,—I was going to say, *after so many years' trouble*; but when I consider who it is that has said “It is more blessed to give than to receive;” that there is more satisfaction and happiness in *doing good* to others, than in receiving kindnesses ourselves; I forbear calling it a trouble, and I know you will pardon me.

\* This Sermon was preached before the Societies for the education of poor children, at St. Lawrence July 1710, and at St. Dunstan's in the East 1711.

And if those that are afraid of engaging in these works of charity, for fear of the trouble that attends them, or lest their worldly business might suffer by their loss of time;—if such persons would but consider, how many hours they have to spare,—how many they trifle away,—how many they spend in vanity, and some, it is to be feared, in worse than vanity;—one would hope that there would never want a number of men to *form societies of this kind*, to *countenance*, to *assist*, and to *support* one another, in promoting the glory of God, and the interest of his kingdom.

II. And this brings us to the second observation;—*That in promoting the Kingdom of God, we ought to be satisfied with the Ordinances of Christ*, (who best knew how to promote his Father's glory;) and not to be looking for, or depending upon, extraordinary appearances in our favour, lest we tempt God to leave us to ourselves, and the ways of our own devising.

And this, indeed, seems to be the main design of *this* parable; to shew us, that Jesus Christ, having established his kingdom amongst men, hath left it, *until his coming again*, to *subsist*, to *increase*, and *prosper*, by the means of grace which he has appointed, and by the ordinary assistances of the Holy Spirit.

That he came forth from God, and declared unto us the true will of God; it was necessary we should be convinced of *this* by some way extraordinary. This he did, by plain and undoubted miracles, by fulfilling the many prophecies which expressly foretold—his *birth*, his *condition*, and his *sufferings*; and especially, by his *resurrection from the dead*, he was (as the Apostle observes) “declared to be the Son of God, with power.”

Having thus sown the seed of the Kingdom by his own hand, he ascended into Heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God, “there to reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet;” or, in the words of the parable, “till the harvest shall come.”

But before he left the world, that he might not lose *the travail of his soul*, the fruits of his labour, he appointed a *Standing Ministry*, and other *means of grace*, as pledges of his truth and love, until his coming again.

Amongst other means, that of *instructing the ignorant* is the foundation of all the rest,—a method which has been very happily chosen, and heartily pursued of late, in order “to bring men from the power of Satan unto God.” For thus men are dealt with as *reasonable creatures*;—they are shewed their duty, and the danger of neglecting it;—



they have the hopes and fears of the world to come truly represented to them;—they have the means of grace freely offered them;—and they are left without excuse, if they despise or neglect their own salvation.

And if this method of instruction ever come to be slighted or refused, the consequence would, no doubt of it, be very fatal to Christianity.

To be dealt with as reasonable creatures, we must be informed,—What our condition is;—in what relation we stand to God;—what it is he expects from us;—what we have to fear if we neglect his commands;—and what we may hope for, if we live in obedience to his laws;—how we may overcome the corruption of our nature;—what Jesus Christ has done for us, and what we must do ourselves, towards working out our own salvation. When this is done after a plain and easy way, and suited to the capacities of those we instruct, it is hardly possible to say what can be done more, towards bettering the world.

The great and plausible objection to this way of instruction has always been *this*:—That wickedness is at a great height;—that the work of reformation goes but slowly on by these ordinary methods;—that it were to be wished God would appear in some extraordinary manner, to *awaken*, to *convince*, and to *convert* men.

From wishing this, people of warm heads have often come to attempt it; and there has scarce been any age, in which some or other have not appeared with these pretences, and new commissions from God, *for reforming the world*; never considering, that the kingdom of God is so often compared by our Saviour to *corn sown in the earth*, to *a grain of mustard-seed set in the ground*, to *leaven hid in meal*,—to signify to us, that the Gospel is to be propagated, and piety increased, by the usual methods of Providence, and the silent influences of God's good Spirit, not with pomp, and noise, and strange appearances.

It is true, the giddy world is very apt to be taken with, and imposed upon, by new and surprising pretenders to reformation; and there never want men of evil designs, who, mixing with the ignorant and well-meaning, do not fail of gaining profelytes. But, in the mean time, religion suffers by these pretenders, and the world has not at all been mended by their preaching.

For bad as the world is, men in general are not so mad yet as to lay by their regular teachers, and despise the ordinances of God, at the instance of such persons as bring no warrant for what they affirm besides their own testimony.

I mention these instances, to convince you *of the societies*, that the methods you take for the instruction of children, destitute of help and learning, are most agreeable to the ways of God's appointment, and most likely (by the blessing of God) to promote his glory, and a reformation of manners, so much wished for by all good men.

III. From this then we proceed to the third observation,—*That such as are engaged in the good work of promoting the Kingdom of God ought not to be discouraged, because they do not see immediately the fruit of their labours.* “The seed springs, and grows up we know not how, and so does the kingdom of God.”

Good men have ever been apt to despond, and suspect the worst, when they have taken a serious view of the world, and seen its wickedness. The children of Israel, (saith the sorrowful Prophet, 1 Kings xix. 14.) “The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left.” But what saith the answer of God? “I have reserved to myself seven thousand men that have not bowed to the image of Baal.”

But let the world be as bad as it will, (and that is bad enough, God knows) this should neither discourage us from endeavouring to mend it, nor put us upon unwarrantable ways of doing it.

It is very certain, that when Jesus Christ lived in the world, and his Apostles after him, there was as great a degeneracy amongst those people with whom they conversed, as ever there has been since; and yet they made use of the same methods of converting men, as we do at this day, *and of no other, after once their mission was proved and established.*

They exhorted the Jews to read the Scriptures; and assured the Gentiles, that unto *them* God had granted repentance unto life; that both one and the other ought to repent and turn unto God, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance.

They exhorted parents to bring up their children in the fear of God; children to be obedient to their parents; masters to treat their servants well, and servants to be faithful to them.

In short; what they then delivered to the world to be *believed* and *done*, *we*, at *this* day, endeavour to recommend and press the very same truths.

And as those truths (though coming from the mouth of the Son of God) were rejected by many then, so we must not be surprised, if they are still despised by too many now; nor ought *our* Ministry, nor *your* worthy endeavours,



endeavours, to be despised, because the world is much unreformed, notwithstanding all we can do.

But after all, we have not so melancholy a prospect before us as this comes to; here is abundance of good seed sown in this place, and in many places of the kingdom.

Besides those that are instructed by their pious parents, there are many thousands who have none else to take care of them;—there are many thousands of these *at this day* educated and brought up in the knowledge and fear of God, by the care and charity of others. And are we to hope for no good from all this? Will *they*, when they are grown up, will they *all* forget their God, their benefactors, the principles in which they have been educated, the duties they have been taught, and the sins they have been warned against? God forbid we should think so ill of the great Lord of the world, who blessed the labours of the husbandman with a constant increase; and why should not we be confident he will bless our endeavours with proportionable success?

But whatever shall be the visible fruits of your labours *now*,

IV. *There is a time coming when we shall certainly reap according as we have sown.—There will be an harvest.* And as *that* is the husbandman's great comfort, so ought it to be *our's*. It will be a subject of comfort upon *two accounts especially*, as we shall certainly see the *fruit* of our labours, and as we shall meet with the *reward* of our labours.

To see those whom we have plucked as firebrands out of the fire, giving God eternal praises for his goodness, in making *us* the instruments of their *conversion* and *salvation*. To find the Lord of Heaven and Earth, who needs none of our services, yet accepting of our poor endeavours, and rewarding them beyond our utmost wishes!—The thoughts of this is sufficient to make us bear with patience the discouragements we meet with; and still strive steadily to pursue the work we have undertaken, “to bring men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.”

And now, to come to a conclusion of this discourse. The *Charities* I am to recommend to you are well known to all that hear me. As there are in all places, and especially in great towns, very many poor who have cast off all modesty, and can ask relief with assurance, and without restraint; so there are a great many, who will suffer very much before they can prevail with themselves to let their necessities be known. I am therefore to put you in mind, that one part of what you think fit to give, will faith-

fully and religiously be laid out upon such objects as these.

We all readily allow, that these are the *true objects* of *charity*; but it is not in every body's way to find them out. Now, here we have them found out by persons who delight to do good; and we have an opportunity of relieving families which would blush to ask or to receive our alms in publick, and yet cannot subsist without help. Thus will one part of your alms be bestowed.

As for the *other part*, it will, *beyond controversy*, be laid out to the best purposes in the world; in giving a Christian education to those whose hard fortune it would be (without the help of others) to live and die in vice and ignorance. For that there are very many, in the very throng of Christians, who know little of *God*, of *themselves*, or of their errand into the world,—who live in vicious courses, and die without fear of danger,—is a truth too plain to be questioned. And though this can never be wholly prevented by the piety and industry of men, yet it is a worthy attempt (and God has wonderfully blessed the undertaking) to rescue so many thousands, in this and most great towns in these nations, from extreme poverty, and the consequences of it, which are generally want of instruction, gross ignorance, great temptations to vice, and a proneness to run into it.

Now, to countenance, to promote, and to continue this great and good work, is one great occasion of our meeting at this time;—a work, in which every one present *is*, or *ought* to be, concerned; some to give, and others faithfully to manage what is given to this purpose.

The advantages will be very many; the number of evil examples will every day be lessened; a great many families, *knowing* and *fearing* God, will in *his good time* be established; a great many among these, gratefully remembering the hand that raised them out of the dust, will be ready hereafter to continue this sort of charity to future generations:—In the mean time, we shall be no losers by what we give; it is seed sown, which will have its increase *infallibly*. And indeed, could we but see all the benefits attending this charitable work, we should give with that cheerfulness which good men feel when they are sure they are laying up their treasure in heaven.

In one word; it is by the good blessing of God, that so many of us here present want nothing that is needful either for our souls or our bodies; whatever we are able to give cometh of him, and of *his own* do we give him.

Let us therefore, instead of withholding our charity, let us beseech God to pardon all



all our vain expences; to make us so careful of his blessings, as that we may always be able and ready to offer some testimony of our gratitude for the many blessings we have received from God, to be given where his providence shall direct to give.

And the good Lord give a blessing to all our charities, and especially to this before

us, that they may continue, and always answer the ends proposed by them.

And God Almighty grant, if ever it should be his pleasure to change our circumstances into a worse condition, that we may bear it patiently, knowing that we have a treasure in heaven.

To which place, &c.

## S E R M O N XLV.

### THE DANGER OF LIVING IN ANY KNOWN SIN.

ROMANS i. 28.

*And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient.\**

**I**F people were but as well aware and afraid of the *causes* of God's forsaking men and leaving them to themselves, as they are startled at the very thoughts of the condition of those that are so given up, it is certain they would be more careful of their ways than generally they are.

Now, the reason here given why God left the heathens to themselves, and suffered them to fall into idolatry and all manner of wickedness, is this: *They would not retain God in their knowledge.* That is, they forgot their dependance upon him; they were not afraid of his displeasure; they were not thankful for his favours; upon which God gave them up to a *reprobate mind*, or, as it is translated in the margin of our Bible, *a mind void of judgment.* In which words we have a just account and reason of God's deserting men; of the causes and steps which lead to this dreadful judgment; and of the consequences and effects which attend it.

For the short account is *this*:—Men fall into sinful company and courses; and either from the good education they have had, or from the checks of natural conscience, finding it uneasy to live *in sin*, while they have a lively sense of God upon their souls, they therefore endeavour to divert such thoughts and fears as make them uneasy, until time, and wicked principles, and wicked company, reconcile them to every abomination. And that which most effectually helps on their ruin is this:—They often sin with hopes and purposes of some time returning to sober reason, until they fall into such courses as make them forget both their purposes and their God.

Therefore, in treating upon this subject, I shall be obliged to lay before you *the danger of living in any known sin*, for that is the beginning of all our misery; and to shew you that people run a greater hazard than generally they are aware of, who go against their consciences in lesser things, and venture to break the laws of God, in hopes of taking up *when they please*.

And how necessary it is that we should be truly convinced of this, appears from hence, because most people do find, *by sad experience*, that they have fallen into such sins and courses, which, sometime in their lives, they abhorred the thoughts of; and because there was a time when the most profligate sinners hated those vices, which *now* they are so fond of, and were afraid of the anger of God, and his judgments, which *now* they despise.

It will therefore be of great use to us to know by what means men come to change their thoughts and practices so much for the worse; to know that the wickedness, and consequently the miseries of men, are owing to their own carelessness, and wilful continuing in known sin, and not to any harsh and fatal decree, which brings them to ruin; and that men are virtuous and good, not because they cannot be otherwise, but because they find it reasonable and just to be afraid of judgments and danger, when God gives them warning, and to avoid those things which he has told them will bring them to destruction; by which means they secure his favour and protection, and by his goodness and providence are kept from such wickedness as would otherwise ruin them.

\* See Exod. x. 27. xiv. Zeph. i. 17.



So that we shall from hence learn how much every man ought to contribute to his own happiness, and how much he may contribute to his own misery, if he will be obstinately careless.

For thus much is *implied* in the text,—That God hath given us understanding souls,—that he hath made himself and his will so far known to us as is necessary and sufficient, by his assistance, to keep us from sin and misery. And so long as we retain in our minds this sense and knowledge of God, it will be a powerful means of keeping us from sin, of securing ourselves in his favour, and of attaining that happiness which we so passionately wish for.

Then what follows is *expressed* in the text, which is, that if men, thus furnished with the knowledge of God and of their duty, and with a power of choosing well, are, notwithstanding, careless of themselves and their ways; if they will “not retain God in their knowledge,” but drive him from them by their wicked deeds; if they will continue to do so, then will God give them up to a *reprobate mind*; that is, they will become incapable of judging what is good, of choosing what is safe, and of avoiding what is dangerous. For God will leave them to themselves, and remove all those hindrances which before kept them from the foulest vices: And whereas, they made wickedness their choice *before* against reason, they shall at last become unable to think, to act, to live, like men endued with reason.

This is, I think, a just account of these words, and of that power which every man has, of contributing very much to his own present and future happiness, by the grace of God assisting him.

I know this text has sometimes been made use of to back and keep up an ungrateful and an unnecessary controversy in the church of God: But who doth not see that it is much easier from these words to persuade men to be good from the assurance of God’s assisting grace, and to deter them from evil, because of the danger of continuing in known sin, than it would be to give them the least satisfaction from hence about the difficult points of election and reprobation?

And because I am sure it will be a work much more useful to you, and more acceptable to God, to endeavour to mend your lives, rather than to gratify your curiosities, I do therefore choose these words for a discourse altogether practical; in which I shall consider man under these two very different circumstances:—

First, *As he is under the especial care and protection of God*; that is, so long as he retains God in his knowledge, life, &c.

Secondly; *As he is forsaken of God, and left to himself.*

I. And *first*; it is necessary we should be made sensible of our condition, as we are under the care, direction, and providence of God; that we may be thankful for it, endeavour to improve it, and careful not to forfeit so great a blessing.

*That God made man upright*, we are sure, because he that made us has told us so; that is, he hath given us an understanding soul, a desire after happiness, and an aversion to, an abhorrence of such things as are unbecoming, or would be hurtful to us. From whence it is, that most people, before they have been corrupted by evil examples and wicked customs, are apt to blush and start at lesser vices, as men usually do when any thing unnatural or dangerous comes near them. And many there are, who, by the grace of God, preserve this natural modesty, and their innocence, till they come to an age of reason and instruction, and know for certain that there is more hurt in sin than the shame that attends it.

For God vouchsafes to instruct those that will hear and obey his word, and makes them see the folly and the danger of transgressing his commands. He gives his holy Angels charge concerning them. His Holy Spirit is ever present with them, to enlighten their minds with saving truth; by which good Spirit they are enabled to know the will of God, and to do what he requireth of them; by him they are put in mind of their duty when they forget it, corrected when they are backward and negligent, supported under all temptations, comforted under afflictions; the Holy Ghost from time to time increasing his favours, as men make good use of them.

And that thus it really is with all such as are under the government of God’s Holy Spirit, not only the Word of God assures us, but daily experience will convince us; for why are some men better than others? Why do some avoid, resist, overcome, temptations to impiety, and others greedily swallow every bait that lies in their way?

It is plain it is not from ourselves that we are not all equally wicked; for we are all by nature born in sin, and equally prone to it; but God by his grace and his providence interposes, sometimes by diverting men’s evil designs, by ruffling their consciences, by laying invisible restraints upon their lusts and passions, or by the natural and visible distempers of the body, breaking the force, and curbing the unruly and headstrong desires of the soul: For, as Elihu in the book of Job observes, “If men are  
“hound



“bound in fetters, and holden in cords of affliction, then is God shewing them their works, and their transgression; by this means he openeth their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.”<sup>a</sup>

Now, as many as hear his voice, and will be governed by his Spirit and Laws; all that are serious and thoughtful of what must come hereafter, or, in other words, *they that endeavour to retain God in their knowledge*, by hearing his holy Word, by praying to him for what they want, and by giving him thanks for what they receive at his hands; such men are beloved of God, assisted and governed by his Spirit, and are secure from fear of evil.

II. But so are not they that *do not retain God in their knowledge*. For they are constantly in danger of doing such things as will expose them to shame, troubles, and misfortunes, while they live; and, when they die, they are sure to change this unhappy life for a much worse. For what should restrain them from doing every wickedness which comes within their knowledge and power?

When there was no King in Israel, the consequence you know was, “that every man did that which was right in his own eyes.” And when a man has once discharged God from that supreme power he hath, and ought to have, over the heart and soul, that man will do what seems good to himself, though all the world besides count him a fool and a madman.

We meet indeed with men who have very airy notions of honour, of what is right and wrong; and believe that principles of reason and experience, and a sense of what is fit and becoming an understanding creature, will keep them from such a pitch of folly and wickedness as shall expose them to shame, danger, and the anger of God.

But then it is not well considered, that men have very different notions of what is good and praise-worthy; nor is it considered that interest, and passion, and vice, will change the sentiments. So that a man, who at one time of his life thought such a thing dishonourable, may come at last to be reconciled to that very action, and with eagerness and delight commit it.

And is there any wickedness which can be named, that men born with reason, but destitute of the grace of God, have not been guilty of? Our first parents are an instance sufficient to shew us what Reason, *in its greatest perfection*, when left to itself, will end in; namely, in the destruction of those

that trust to it. And will any man on earth pretend to govern himself by reason better than they did?

And if a person who had such excellent notions of justice and temperance as that Prince had, who first debauched the wife, and then murdered the husband; if two such succeeding crimes could gain upon him, notwithstanding his knowledge, experience, and the commands of God to the contrary, *who* afterwards will pretend that reason, natural conscience, honour, or any thing but the Spirit of God, can secure a man's innocence?

In short; there is nothing so wicked, nothing so base, dishonourable, or destructive, that one man is guilty of, but another is by nature capable of being so.

And though this will look strange to one who finds in his breast a perfect abhorrence for some vices, and supposes he should die, rather than be guilty of them; yet he may perhaps change his thoughts, when he considers that there are few people who, in many instances, do not come to be in love with sins, which once in their lives they had a hearty dislike to.

The Scriptures have given us several very noted examples of this:—“Am I a dog,” said Hafeel to the Prophet, “that ever I should do such vile things as you speak of?” And yet for all this abhorrence, he did those very wicked actions. “Though I die with thee, yet will I not deny thee in any wise,” said St. Peter; and after all, being left for one moment to himself to make that promise good, you know how it ended.

Now these things are written for our example, that we may see what poor, weak creatures we are by nature; that we may learn not to value ourselves, not to trust in our own reason or strength, or in any thing but *the living God*,—for if He once desert us, we are undone for ever.

For as we have no power of ourselves to do any thing that is good; as we have no power of ourselves to resist temptations, and that evil Spirit, “who goes about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour;” so shall we have no power of ever returning to sober reason, of ever repenting of our sins, or of qualifying ourselves for future happiness.

For those who, by open and avowed profaneness, by living in hypocrisy, or in a continued state of wickedness, have forced God to leave them to themselves, such persons are proof against all those means which God makes use of to reduce mistaken men.

The

<sup>a</sup> Chap. xxxviii. 8.



The Word of God, *how powerful soever it be*, cannot convince one who will never hear it with seriousness; the examples of good men will have no effect upon one who has used himself to despise them; the judgments of God upon the wicked will make no impressions upon one who has accustomed himself to call them mere accidents; nay, miracles themselves, though they are called for by unbelievers, and are indeed a sure sign that God is present with those that work them *in his name*, even miracles themselves are not sufficient to convert an obstinate sinner, whose affections are to be changed, as well as his judgments, which miracles cannot effect:—A remarkable instance of which we have in Acts iv. 16; where the Jews own, that indeed a notable miracle had been done by the Apostles, as was manifest to all Jerusalem, and *we* (say they) cannot deny it: Why then, sure they received their testimony:—Very far from it! But instead of that, they threatened and commanded them to speak no more, or teach in the name of Christ.

Nothing could be more unreasonable than this, or more effectually shew the difficulties men lay themselves under of being reformed, when once they have made themselves incapable of judging betwixt good and evil, by a long course of wickedness.

One need not use more words to convince any thoughtful man, that as there is nothing upon earth which can give greater satisfaction to the soul of man than the assurance of being under the care and protection of God, so there is no estate so truly terrible as that of a man's being abandoned of God and left to himself.

By what steps and means men bring themselves into this sad estate, is what we now come to consider: "They did not like to retain God in their knowledge;" that is, they did not endeavour to keep up such a sense of God in their minds as was necessary to secure his favour and protection, but they depended upon themselves, their own reason, and strength; they neglected his Word, and the cautions therein contained; they did not fear his threatenings, nor think upon his promises; they did not ask his help, nor give him thanks for the common mercies they enjoyed: And this is the way that all who are ruined bring destruction upon themselves.

Most people, at least in the beginning of their days, feel in their souls an aversion for many vices they see in others: Thus they think it will always be with them; this makes them less careful of their ways;—by degrees they grow more careless; this makes them more wicked;—and wickedness

being countenanced by multitude of examples, they grow bold and fearless of what may come hereafter.

During this time, the Spirit of God strives to reduce them; "for God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not;"—whom if they refuse to hear, to repent, and turn to God, God will at last give them up to themselves, and to the government of those evil spirits, whose business and whose pleasure it is, to bring to destruction all those who put themselves out of God's protection.

Now, that this is truly the case of wicked men,—that this is matter of fact, and not arguments only to frighten people, is plain from hence:—Ask a man who is going to suffer for his villainies, whether ever he suspected it would come to this, that he should do such things as would bring him to an untimely end? Ask the spendthrift who wants bread, whether he dreamt of such a change? In short; let every sinner ask himself, (and then we shall all be convinced) let us all ask ourselves, whether by giving way to our appetites, we have not done such things as some time we abhorred, and never feared our being guilty of them?

This consideration furnisheth us with an account of those horrid crimes, which are but too frequently committed, and which even human nature startles at: For one man to murder another who never injured him;—for a woman to strangle the child of her womb;—for a man to blaspheme him who with one word can send him to hell. These are wickednesses which we are amazed at, and wonder that any thing that carries the shape of a man, can be guilty of such crimes. But then we do not consider that human nature, as it is now corrupt, is the same in all men.

We are all subject to temptations; and if, by our repeated crimes, we should ever force the Spirit of God to leave us to ourselves, no man can tell, no man can foresee, what barbarous wickedness he shall at last be tempted to commit, nor what unwelcome, unlooked-for calamity he may bring upon himself, while he goes from sin to sin, till he meets with destruction.

Now; from what has been said, we may very justly make these *following observations*:—That no man will continue long at one certain pitch of wickedness, but either he must reform and grow better, or he will still grow more depraved and vicious. Our souls are very active beings, and we may truly say of them what we commonly do of children, that we must be employed in what is good, or we shall certainly be doing mischief: for not only one evil habit begets another, but the



the more a man sins, the less capable he still makes himself of judging what sin *is*, and what will be the consequences of continuing in it. And the influences of God's Holy Spirit, and the methods of his providence, have still less power upon his mind and soul, till he has quite forgotten God, till God has forsaken him, till he has filled up the measure of his wickedness, and till he meets with destruction.

Therefore, no man can be secure of himself, who will continue in the practice of any known vice; nor can he be sure that in time he shall not be reconciled to the most abominable wickedness; for no man can at first force himself to do what in time, and by degrees, he may make easy to his mind and practice.

Whoever considers some passages in the life of Solomon, will find a wonderful contradiction in his sentiments and his actions. And the first part of his life was so very different from the last, that those who do not consider how very fruitful sin is, and how apt to change the whole man, would hardly believe that one and the same person was *he* who in so pious a strain dedicated a temple to the God of heaven, and *he* who afterwards fell into the grossest idolatry.—But the steps he took were such as would effectually change him so much for the worse. He went against the express command of God in taking wives from amongst the idolatrous nations; he depended upon his own reason and strength, believing that he could never forget and forsake that God who had after so gracious a manner appeared to him, and had given him such an uncommon share of wisdom.

But this effectually shews, that neither the greatest share of wisdom, nor the best education, nor the greatest favours of God, are sufficient to secure us, when once we leave the commands of God. For this Prince's advantages, that he had above others, made him careless; this brought him to intemperance;—his ease and intemperance made him a slave to his lusts, and his wives;—and these made him as great an idolater as any of those nations, which God, for that sin, had cast out of the land of Canaan; by which he brought upon himself, and entailed upon his family, such troubles as ended in the destruction of it.

And thus it will be with every man living, who knowingly allows himself in the practice of what God has forbidden him.

There is no man who did not sometime in his life count *drunkenness* a sin; and those that are yet undebauched cannot imagine what it is that can bewitch men to make

them fond of a sin which disorders both body and mind: And yet how does custom prevail to draw in those who once abhorred the vice; and to how many other sins this leads is so well known, that it need not here be mentioned.

The same may be observed of that too common sin of *swearing*, which example and impunity have made so easy to too many, that they count it amongst the faults of human frailty, (though to a considering man it is a most horrid crime) for it leads men naturally to speak of God without fear and without reverence: This leads them to impiety, to atheism, and to damnation.

And indeed there is no security, until a man has so far gained upon himself that he can be content to hear the voice of God within him, and to obey the dictates of his conscience;—till he can resolve to put a stop to the very beginning of vice, and knows for certain, that to allow of any one known sin, is but too sure a way to fall into another.

Therefore, it is strange to see men confident that for themselves they shall never do such things as others are blamed and punished for; when at the same time they freely indulge themselves the liberty of such things as grieve the Spirit of God, by whom alone they are kept from the greatest villanies.

And this brings us to *another observation* from these words, that God does never suspend his grace, while men continue worthy of such a mercy;—that is, while there is any hope (and God knows it very well) whether his grace will not be still abused, and still despised.

The goodness and the justice of God give us all the assurance imaginable of the truth of this; and the constant methods of his providence shew us, that he leaves no means untried which may become a merciful Father, and a just Creator, to bring his children and creatures to their duty and happiness.

And therefore, though we have many ways provoked the justice of God, yet we are sure he has not given us up to ourselves, if we are sorry for our miscarriages, and are resolved to take up for the time to come;—for such thought and such purposes come from the good Spirit of God, which never doth any thing in vain.

But then this is no reason why a man should still continue in sin, in hopes that the same good Spirit will some way or other preserve him from ruin; for, it is true, God doth wonderfully prevent us while there is



any hope of a reformation; but when that is over, when we have wearied the patience and long-suffering of God, (*for he will not strive with us for ever*) then we may expect to be given over to a reprobate mind.

This then is the use we are to make of this knowledge:—

*First*; We should always endeavour to live in the fear of God, that we may not consent to known iniquity. This was the holy Psalmist's rule:<sup>a</sup> "I have set God al-ways before me, therefore I shall not fall;" that is, he endeavoured to have it always in his mind, that God was ever present with him, saw all his actions, heard all his words, and knew the very thoughts of his heart.

*Secondly*; If at any time we fall, what have we to do but to follow the example of the same Psalmist:<sup>b</sup> "I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments." And let us not fancy, that we can repent and turn to God when we please; but remember, that every sin a man knowingly commits, the more careless and the more hardened he grows, and consequently more unfit for God's grace, without which no man ever did repent.

*Thirdly*; When the Holy Spirit of God puts into our minds good thoughts and desires, we see how dangerous a thing it is to strive to divert them. And we shall not do so, if we remember the dreadful words of God:<sup>c</sup> "Because I called and ye refused; ye set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof; I will therefore laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh."

*Lastly*; We see how dangerous it is to neglect the means of grace which God has appointed to keep up a sense of his majesty in our hearts. People do not consider, that we cannot please God, but in the ways of his own appointment; so that no man can tell what he shall do, what he shall be, when once he ventures to leave or to neglect the means of grace afforded him in the church of God.

In short; if we are under the conduct of

the Spirit of God, we may know that we are so by these short observations:—

*First*; We shall be very *humble*, knowing that we have nothing of our own to boast of; "for it is God that worketh in us both a will and a power to do any thing that is good."

*Secondly*; We shall be very careful of our ways, knowing that we are under the direction of an Holy Spirit, who will forsake those that grieve him by their evil deeds.

*Lastly*; We shall be very *thankful*, that God is pleased to take the government of us himself, and not to leave us in the hands of our own counsel, for then we are sure to be undone. And we shall strive to express our gratitude by doing what he has commanded us.

On the other hand, they that live in any known sin,—they that are careless of their souls,—they that neglect the ordinary duties of religion,—may be assured of it, that they are taking themselves out of God's protection, and putting themselves into the service of the Devil; and that they cannot go back *when* they please into the service of God, no more than they can go to heaven without the leave of God.

To conclude the whole:—

Happy are those who from being great sinners become worthy penitents; but the ways of sin are extremely dangerous, and the return to righteousness difficult, irksome, and hazardous.

More happy therefore by far, and more safe, are the circumstances of those who, from their very youth being taught to know and to fear the Lord their Maker, are careful not to grieve his Holy Spirit, by consenting to, and continuing in known iniquity; for then that good Spirit will ever be present with them, to lead them in the way they should go, until all danger will be over, and they are secure from fear of evil: Which God grant we may all be in his good time, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, and thanksgiving, now and for ever. *Amen.*

<sup>a</sup> Ps. xvi. 9.

<sup>b</sup> Ps. cxix. 60.

<sup>c</sup> Prov. i. 24.



## S E R M O N XLVI.

Ninth Sunday after Trinity, and Evening after the Sacrament.

## THE EXAMPLE OF THE JEWS A WARNING TO CHRISTIANS.

I COR. X. II.

*Now all these things happened unto them for Ensamples: and they are written for our Admonition, &c.*

IN this chapter the Apostle shews, (and that by the example of the Israelites) that to be in covenant with God, and to partake of the Sacraments, which are the seals of the covenant, will not secure us from destruction, if we do not live worthy of such a favour.

“I would not,” saith he, “brethren, have you ignorant, that all our fathers were baptised as well as we, and did all eat the same spiritual meat, and did all drink the same spiritual drink;” that is, they were partakers of the same covenant, and sacraments, and promises, that we are; and yet, notwithstanding all these privileges, those that were disobedient were destroyed in the wilderness, and never entered into the land of Canaan, which was a figure of Heaven.

Now all these things were written for our admonition; that is, to warn us not to depend upon being Christians, without living as becomes Christians.

Let him therefore, who thinketh *he standeth*, that is, high in God’s favour because he is a Christian, *take heed lest he fall*; as the Israelites did in the wilderness, and never set their eyes upon the Land of Promise, which they so much desired.

When we hear the account of the strange behaviour of the people of Israel, while God was bringing them out of slavery, in order to make them happy in a land of their own, we cannot but wonder at it; we are apt to think it impossible, that people should see so many miracles wrought in their favour, and yet should distrust, at every turn, the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of that God that wrought them.

And yet so it was: And the Psalmist expresseth his wonder after a most elegant manner: “They were disobedient at the sea, even at the Red Sea;” at the very

place where God had saved them by the greatest miracle that ever man had seen.

In short; their whole life was one continued miracle; they had their meat from heaven, their garments waxed not old, their enemies fell before them, the visible judgments of God fell upon them over and over for their sins, and yet they were disobedient. The conclusion of all was, God was so provoked by their unworthy behaviour and ingratitude, that he suffered very few of them ever to enjoy the Land of Canaan, which he had promised to give them.

But you will say, *What is this to us?* Why, I will tell you—the Apostle shall tell you,—These things were written for our admonition, *for a warning to us*, to let us know how God has ever dealt, and for ever will deal, with those that despise his mercies, and forbearance, and long-suffering.

In short, as the goodness of God, to those that obeyed him amongst the Jews, was a figure of the favour and loving-kindness which he bears to all others that love and fear him; so the severity of God to that whole nation, in suffering so few of them ever to set a foot on the promised Land, is a figure of that severity with which he will deal with wicked Christians;—he will for ever shut them out of heaven, of which Canaan was a figure.

But we are apt to think, that we are not so *blind*, and *stubborn*, and *hard-hearted*, and *wicked*, as the Jews were. People are apt to think, that the world is now civilized, and that Christians are not so liable to God’s judgments as heretofore. I would to God it were so; but really it is not. Many that call themselves Christians can make a shift to be as wicked as either Jews or Heathens.

Observe the malice and envy with which one Christian pursues another, rejoicing in the ruin and misery of their fellow-creatures;—

Laying



Laying snares for one another in all manner of business;—scarce any security from another man's word or oath;—

All things carried by power, or interest, or craft;—

The *rich* oppressing the *poor*, because it is in the power of their hand to do it; and the *poor* envying the *rich*, instead of helping them by their prayers to heaven;—

Parents educating their children after such a manner, as will ruin them as certainly as if they intended their ruin, teaching them to love the world with all their heart and soul, instead of renouncing it; suffering them to content themselves with a form of religion, without the power;—

Pastors as little concerned for the flocks committed to their charge, as if in truth they were so many beasts, whose souls must die with their bodies.

In short, if the *Jews* were disobedient to God, so are Christians;—if *they* were ungrateful, so are *we*;—if *they* were within the covenant of mercy, and yet lived as ill as those that were strangers to the covenant and promises, so do Christians, who have yet greater things to fear and hope for, than ever *they* had;—if *they* were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, by the mighty hand of God, and yet as soon forgot the mercy as it was over, even so Christians, who have been delivered from a greater tyranny and bondage than that of Pharaoh, do yet forget the mercy, and desire to return to the slavery of sin and death.

In one word; the Israelites in Egypt and in the wilderness are exact figures of Christians in this world, and in their passage to the next, except in this one thing,—that God, being wearied as it were and provoked by their backslidings, did at last swear that none of them, that had so ungratefully abused his favours, should enter into the place of rest designed for them.

In this one thing we are happier than they, in that we have it yet in our power to work out our salvation; to appease our God by repentance, to avert his judgments by returning to our duty, and to secure to ourselves a share in his promise of heaven and happiness eternal.

What faith the Apostle to Christians on this head? “To-day, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;” for, as the *promises*, and *mercies*, and *assurances*, and *rewards*, to Christians, far exceed those which God made to the Jews; so the punishment which wicked Christians will meet with will be infinitely greater than any they had to fear.

So very little reason have Christians to value themselves upon the *better covenant*, and *better promises*, and *better means* of grace, which God has afforded them, if they do not make a *better use* of them.

Let us all, therefore, seriously consider this portion of Holy Scripture, and what befel the Jews for their frequently provoking God by their sins; that is, that at last God for ever shut them out of Canaan.

Let us also fear, lest a promise being made us of entering into heaven, any of us should come short of it; ever remembering, that the people of Israel had the same God, the same promises, the same law, that we have:—And this advantage *we* have which they had not;—we may learn by their example not to provoke God too far, lest he treat us with the same severity he did them, shut us for ever out of the heavenly Canaan.

To conclude:—A Christian Name, a Christian Faith, the Christian Covenant, the Christian Sacraments, will not set us one step nearer heaven, without a Christian Life. So that the case of Christians is far from being better than that of Jews and Heathens, if they are not careful to lead a Christian life.



## S E R M O N XLVII.

## THE REPENTANCE OF SINNERS MATTER OF JOY IN HEAVEN.

LUKE XV. 7, 10.

*I say unto you, That likewise joy shall be in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance. Likewise I say unto you, There is joy in the presence of the Angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.*

THE Pharisees were much offended with our Lord for shewing so much concern for sinners as to keep them company, in order to teach them their duty, and to convince them of their danger.

Our Lord assures them, by these three parables,<sup>a</sup> that God is well pleased when sinners are converted; that the Angels rejoice at it; and that such as are at the pains to bring back poor, ignorant, or wicked people, that have gone astray like lost sheep, do a work very acceptable to God, and God will reward them for it.

In short; our Lord has, by these similitudes, discovered to us one of the most comfortable truths in the world, which is, that when men have offended God, yet if they become sensible of their sin, and truly sorry for it, God will pardon what is past, and take them into favour, as if they had never offended him.

What is the reason that we can hear such Holy Scriptures as these without being moved? The reason is plain: We do not consider that we are sinners; we do not know what it is to be sinners; we are not sensible that every sinner is liable to the anger of God, is as one *lost* and *undone*, until he repent and be restored to God's favour.

Would you know the condition of a sinner, whose conscience is awake, and lets him see his sin and his condition?

Look upon *David*, when he had been guilty of adultery and murder; hear how he expresses his grief:<sup>c</sup> "My sorrow is continually before me; for mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burden, then, they are too heavy for me."

Look upon *St. Peter*, when he had denied his Lord, and thought upon it, you will find him *weeping bitterly*.

See the *Publican* in the temple; he dares not so much as lift up his eyes, but smites upon his breast, and cries, "God be merciful unto me a sinner."

Consider the penitent Woman, at the feet of Jesus, *washing his feet with her tears*.—What is all this for? Our Lord will tell you: "Her sins were many;" Christ had forgiven her upon her repentance; and thus she expresses her love and thankfulness: She looked upon it as the greatest *mercy* in the world, to be restored to the favour of God, and she would not but shew it by her love and by her tears.

And if we are not thus affected, when we consider how merciful God has been to us, it is because we are not truly sensible what it is to be out of his favour, what it is to be under his displeasure. In short, it is because our consciences were never well awake.

*They that are whole* (or think themselves so) *care not for a physician, but they that are sick. Come unto me, saith our Lord, all ye that travail and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

When once it is thus with men, they will hear these parables with delight, and receive the *doctrines* contained in them with cheerfulness.

They will understand, for instance, with the greatest satisfaction imaginable, that by the *shepherd*, who went to seek his *lost sheep*, is meant Jesus Christ, *who came into the world to seek and to save sinners*: When they hear what pains he took to find it; how he took it upon his shoulders, how he rejoiced that he had found it, and called his friends and his neighbours to rejoice with him; they will then apply this parable to themselves; they will see plainly, that God desires their conversion; that if he desires it, he will afford them all the means of being converted; that their souls are dear in his sight, or else he would not have sent his own Son to seek and to save them.—*Then* they will see and acknowledge the tender love of this good Shepherd, who spared no pains to find his lost sheep; they will therefore love him, desire to please him, and not willingly do any thing that may justly offend him.

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And

<sup>a</sup> The Parables of the Lost Sheep, of the Piece of Silver, and of the Prodigal Son.

<sup>c</sup> Ps. xxxviii.



And when they hear again the *parable of the Woman* that had lost a piece of silver, what concern she had upon her, what pains she took to find it, what pleasure she had when he had found it, they will easily see,—that all this is matter of the greatest comfort to sinners; that if the Angels rejoice upon the conversion of a sinner, it is because God is pleased with it, and because they know that God will not reject any that return to him.

And they will still be more convinced of this, when they go on to consider the circumstances of the *Prodigal Son*. He left his father's house without his leave;—that which his father gave him to maintain him decently, he spent upon harlots;—he never thought upon his father, nor the sad affliction he gave him, till he could live no where else: These are all instances of a vile behaviour; and yet after all the father receives him without upbraiding him, and treats him after such a manner as if he had never done amiss.

And will God thus deal with sinners, that return to him after all their wanderings; who, being sensible of their unhappy condition, desire his pardon and favour?

Yes, thus God will deal with his unhappy creatures; *unhappy* because they have offended him, but *happy* in having such a Father, so full of goodness, so ready to pardon.

Will any sinner *after this* say, I would willingly return, if could hope that God would receive and pardon me? A sinner may indeed say, I will not forsake my sins; I will not ask pardon; I will not return to my duty;—but no man can say, if I should desire to return to God, he will not receive me.

Let us *all* then, for we are *all* sinners; let us *all* be encouraged to return to God by a sincere repentance: His *goodness* should lead us to it; our own danger should *spur* us on; the joys of heaven should invite us; and the examples of others being received and pardoned, should encourage us to hope for the same merciful treatment.

In short; the parables we have read will bear witness against us at the last day, that God did invite us, but we unworthily despised his favours of mercy and pardon.

But what pretences have any sinners for not returning to God and depending upon his pardon? Why, some say, that true repentance, being God's gift, if he is not pleased to call them effectually, it is impossible for them ever to return to him, and to their duty.

But does he not call all sinners to repentance? Will he not make that call effectual to every one who will hear his voice?

How did he call the Prodigal? He suffered him to take his own ways, till he made himself miserable;—he suffered him to find no rest in the ways of sin;—he put it into his mind, that he had a merciful Father to return to; he resolved therefore to try his father's goodness, and it fared with him accordingly, he was received and pardoned.

And will not, does not God do all this for every sinner? Does he not make sin uneasy to them? Do they find any rest in the choices they make to make them happy? Does he not call them by the voice of his own Son, and by the mouths of his Ministers? Does he not assure them of his favour? And why is not this effectual? Why, because they will not attend to this call,—because they will not pray for the graces they want,—because they neglect the means of obtaining that grace which God has ordained; *so that their destruction is from themselves*.

But then there are others who give themselves for lost, because their sins are many and great. What! greater than the goodness of God; greater than the merits of his Son; greater than what a tender Father can forgive?

There are others still more perverse; who, because they know they are weak and subject to many failings, do therefore fear that their repentance will never be perfect, and so refuse to set about it; that is, they will not be saved, because they find they cannot save themselves: They will not consider, that men were not made to be independent of their Maker; that therefore they are taught to distrust themselves, and to look up to God for help; that he knows all their weakness, and knows how to apply proper remedies to all their ailments; that his power is magnified in making a *poor, weak, back-sliding* creature, in making dust and ashes, worthy of immortality.

As for those that have returned to God, and yet fear his anger, because of their unavoidable infirmities, they would do well to consider, whether the *good Shepherd*, who took so much pains to seek for, and to bear his lost sheep home on his shoulders, who rejoiced so heartily because he had found it,—whether it is likely *he* would after cast it away, because it was not the best of his flock, or because it should afterwards be distempered. No; that very goodness, which made him to seek his lost sheep, will incline him to do every thing that is fit to save it from being for ever lost.

Let



Let us all then meditate upon these instructive parables.

Let such as have received favours from God be careful not to abuse them to his dishonour, as the Prodigal Son did the portion of goods that fell to his share.

Let such as are under the chastising hand of God consider, as the Prodigal did, that

this is the great goodness of God, in order to reduce them from the error of their ways, and to save them from ruin.

Lastly; let us all meditate upon the mercies of God in Jesus Christ, that his mercy and goodness may lead us to repentance, which will be most acceptable to God, and happy for us all.

## S E R M O N XLVIII.

### THE DESIGN OF GOD'S JUDGMENTS UPON THE CHILDREN OF MEN.<sup>b</sup>

MATTHEW vi. 2.

*Give us this Day our Daily Bread.\**

**S**CARCITY of BREAD is one of those four judgments with which God punisheth sinful nations.<sup>d</sup> God's judgments are intended not only as punishments for past sins, but as warnings to prevent greater; and they are mild or severe, just as people are more or less ripe for vengeance.

Our case at present is something like that of the Jews, mentioned by the Prophet Amos:<sup>e</sup> "I have given you cleanness of teeth, and want of bread, in all your places; yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord."

Another of the Prophets<sup>f</sup> sets down the cause of these judgments: "They did not know," that is, they did not consider, saith the Lord, "that it was I that gave them corn, and wine, and oil," that is, the blessings they enjoyed; "therefore, I will take away their corn; and their land shall mourn; yea, the beasts of the field, yea, the fishes of the sea shall be taken away."

Now; by these judgments God is awakening us *to flee from the wrath to come*; and more especially from that wrath which awaits impenitent sinners in the world to come.

And indeed we are never so truly sensible of God's displeasure, and of our dependance upon him, as when he makes us feel our want of help, and that none else can help us. "When thy judgments are in the world," saith the Prophet,<sup>g</sup> "the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness." And woe be to them if they

do not; for that is a sure sign that they are ripe for destruction.

But this is not God's design in this visitation. His design is, as we said before, to awaken us into a sense of our manifold abuses of his blessings; into a lively sense of our dependance upon him for life, and breath, and all the things we enjoy or hope for; and lastly, to amend what is amiss in us.

Many, very many, are the uses that we may, and *ought* to make of this visitation. Such as are *careless*, and in the midst of plenty, forgetting that it is God that gives them their daily bread, will now see upon whom they depend for the necessities of life.

In the next place, this visitation is certainly designed as a wholesome remedy against the scandalous abuse of God's good creatures; as also, to punish those whose God is their belly, as the Apostle speaks,<sup>h</sup> who aim at nothing so much as to please their appetites, and to satisfy their lusts, without considering the wants and necessities of other people.

It is too often the case in times of plenty, as it was with the Prodigal in the Gospel, when God gives men their portion, they squander it away in riotous living: And a mercy it is, when they are reduced to want, if they have the grace to see and repent of their evil ways.

And indeed the very best of us should be admonished by this scarcity and dearth, how often we have mispent the good gifts of

<sup>b</sup> This Sermon appears to have been preached in the year 1741, "a dreadful dear year," says the Author, in a marginal note, "and scarcity of bread approaching to a famine."

<sup>c</sup> See 1 Tim. vi. 8. "Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content."

<sup>d</sup> Ezek. xiv. 12.

<sup>e</sup> Chap. iv. 6.

<sup>f</sup> Hosea, chap. ii.

<sup>g</sup> Isaiah xxvi. 9.

<sup>h</sup> Phil. iii. 19.



God, which now would have been of blessed use to help those who have hungry bellies.

But above all, the glutton and the drunkard should be ashamed and blush, and bitterly repent, for having abused and wasted the good gifts of God, which are given for the support and comfort of man, not to make men into beasts.

But I must not forget my subject: "Give us this day our daily bread." How often have we said this; how often repeated this petition, without considering what a sad condition we should be in, if God should deny us our daily bread;—what a miserable condition those many are in who *now* feel the want of it;—and lastly, what a *much worse* condition they are in, who have enough, and to spare, and will not help those that want their daily bread, but upon terms that ruin them.

Let me tell you a truth which few *know*, and fewer will *believe*; that the rich owe more to the poor for *their* prayers, than the poor owe to the rich for the relief they give them.

This is a truth as certain as the Gospel: "I was an hungred," saith Christ, "and ye gave me meat; thirsty, and ye gave me drink." Do but consider, *when* Jesus Christ will say this to those that shall have relieved his poor members. Why, even then when he is going to pass the sentence of everlasting life, or eternal death, upon mankind.

This shews us, that the rich, as well as the poor, have reason to beg of God *to give them their daily bread*; that they may have an opportunity of forwarding their own salvation, by shewing their gratitude to God for his more especial favours to them.

If God gives any of us more than our daily bread, it is not because he loves us better than those that want it; but to try our *faith*, whether we will ascribe to him the blessings we enjoy, or to ourselves, and our own endeavours and industry.

Men are but too apt *to sacrifice*, as the Scripture speaks, *to their own net*; that is, to ascribe the blessings they enjoy to their own industry, good fortune, care, or skill, and yet all this will not do without the blessing of God upon their labours. We see and feel this now to our sorrow; and that there is a necessity, besides our own industry, of begging of God to give us our daily bread; or it will be with us as St. Peter told our Lord, "We have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing."

As often, therefore, as we use this petition, "Give us this day our daily bread," we do acknowledge our whole dependance

to be upon God, our heavenly Father, for all things necessary for our souls and bodies. And then, to preserve in our minds a constant sense of this our dependance, we ask these blessings for the present day, knowing, that if we pray for these blessings to-morrow, God will then have the same fatherly care of us, and supply us with what is then necessary and convenient for us.

And observe, that we are directed to pray for bread only; that is, for the necessities of life; because, as we are sinners, and in a state of trial and penance, it becomes us to ask no more than what is necessary to carry us through a state of trial.

Lastly; we are obliged to pray every day for bread, that we may every day remember to whom we are indebted for life, and breath, and all the comforts of life and health.

Let us now consider, how this petition ought to be put in practice.

And first; the return of every meal should oblige us to beg that we may receive God's gifts with his blessing. Man does not live by bread alone, but by food which God gives a blessing to, to fit it for the nourishment of the body.

And then, forasmuch as this prayer is designed for the use of all, poor and rich, high and low;—when the *rich* pray for their daily bread, they are supposed to beg of God his grace, that they may not be corrupted by his gifts, if he has given them more than the plain necessities of life. And the *poor*, that they may not forfeit their right, by their idleness, or discontent; but that God may give his blessing upon their honest endeavours for a livelihood. And, at the same time that they pray for their daily bread, they ought to pray for grace to be content with what God thinks proper to give them; that they may neither murmur, nor envy those that have more than their daily bread, nor attempt to get more, and better their condition by unjust ways.

In short; our present wants force us to see, and to feel, our dependance upon God, and to apply to him for help. He is by these judgments punishing the abuse of his former mercies. Our duty is to repent of those sins, which have brought upon us this visitation, and to resolve, by his grace, which we must also pray for, that whenever it shall please God to turn this scarcity into plenty, (for he only can do it) that we do not forget what we now feel and fear, by falling again into the sins of *luxury*, intemperance, and prodigality.

Let us remember, that frugality is every man's interest as well as duty,—that the rich may have to give to him that needeth, and that the poor may not be tempted to get bread

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xxv. 42.



bread by ways which may ruin their souls as well as bodies.

Rather let us all that suffer in these hard times remember, that though afflictions of this kind are grievous to nature, yet, with regard to another life, they are of great advantage, when, through the grace of God, they are borne with patience and resignation to the divine will.

And may Almighty God sanctify all their bodily wants to the salvation of the souls of all that now feel the want of bread; and may his blessing be upon those who, having more than their daily bread, are ready to give, and glad to distribute, "laying up for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life;"<sup>\*</sup> always remembering, that

<sup>\*</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 19.

the measure of God's bounty and favour to them, ought to be the measure of their kindness to those that are in want.

Lastly; let us never forget, whether poor or rich, that whenever we pray for our daily bread, we beg of God not to deny us the bread that nourisheth to eternal life, which God hath promised to give to them that ask him.

This our Lord hath provided for us in the holy Sacrament. And as we want bread every day to support our mortal bodies, so we want grace every day to support our immortal souls, and to save us from death eternal.

May He, of his infinite mercy and goodness, vouchsafe us this blessing, and his will be done for the rest, for Jesus Christ his sake. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, praise, &c.

## S E R M O N XLIX.

BEFORE THE COURT OF TINWALD, 1736.

THE FOLLY OF UNDERTAKING ANY BUSINESS OF MOMENT, WITHOUT REGARD TO THE WILL AND HONOUR OF GOD.

PROV. xxi. 30.

*There is no Wisdom, nor Understanding, nor Counsel, against the Lord.*

**I** Must first observe to you, how many words are here made use of, by the Holy Spirit, to convince us of the folly of undertaking any business of moment, without regard to the will and honour of God.—There is no *wisdom*, that is, no *discretion*, directing men what is fit to be done; no *understanding*, which can enable a man to see the issue of things; no *counsel* able to give advice, where the will and honour of God is not consulted, and his blessing and direction is not prayed for.

And one may take it for granted, that *this solemn meeting* was, *from the very beginning*, appointed to be ushered in by proper supplications and prayers for the blessing of God upon this government; and by proper instructions from *his Ministers*, how his blessings are to be obtained, and secured.

"Woe unto them that take counsel, but not of me, saith the Lord." And the wisest men have found it so to their cost and shame, when they have neglected to take God along with them in their politics.

The whole race of the Kings of Israel, from Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who taught

Israel to sin, to Hoshea the last King of Israel, who with his whole people were carried into captivity, are a known and flagrant instance of this truth,—*That no happiness is to be expected, where the glory, the honour, and true worship of God are overlooked or despised.*

They all went by this *worldly wise maxim*, that it would not be safe for them to let their people go to Jerusalem to worship, as God had expressly commanded, lest in time they should be tempted to submit to the Kings of Judah; so they set up a worship of their own invention, which ended in an idolatry abhorred of God, and brought upon themselves and their people a miserable captivity, which continues to this very day.

We shall only mention one other instance of the truth and importance of these words just read to you; and this is of one of whose wisdom it is said,<sup>m</sup> "That the counsel of Ahitophel was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God." And he did certainly give Absalom such counsel as would have ruined his father most effectually, if God had not turned his wisdom into foolishness.

<sup>l</sup> Isaiah xxx. 1.

<sup>m</sup> 2 Sam. xvi. 23.



And that men might be convinced, that it was the work of God, and that he interposes in the affairs of men, the Scripture tells us expressly, "That it was God who had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahitophel, that he might bring evil upon Absalom, as also upon his wicked counsellor." *Thus wicked counsels, sooner or later, fall upon the heads of those that give, and upon those that follow them.*

Now; this being a truth declared by the God of Truth, and found such by experience, it follows, (let foolish men despise it at their peril) that in all our counsels we should, in the first place, have an eye and regard to the honour, and will, and laws of God, or we shall soon see and feel our mistake.

This, the Apostle tells us, is the great end of civil power and government,—To be a terror to evil doers, and to encourage those that do well, that God in all things may be glorified. And consequently, all laws should be made, and counsels taken, with an eye to these two great ends, *the Glory of God, and the Good of Mankind.*

"Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it," saith holy David, a King himself, and a great master-builder in Israel. And his son sets this down for an uncontested truth, "The throne," that is, the government of every nation, "is established by righteousness;" that is, by righteous laws, and putting them faithfully in execution.

Now; these are two things which every government should aim at:—In the first place, to have **RIGHTEOUS LAWS**. In order to this, let it be considered, that God, the great proprietor of the world and all things in it, having given to certain persons power over the bodies, goods, estates, and even over the lives of their fellow-creatures; left these, finding themselves vested with such high powers, should forget themselves and abuse their authority, as the Wise Man<sup>s</sup> faith wicked men will be apt to do, and say, *Our strength and power shall be the law of justice*; most nations have found it necessary, and have agreed, to have laws to direct both those that are to govern, and those that are to obey.

Now; the two great ends of these laws should be, as we said before, first, *the Glory of God*; and secondly, *the Good of Mankind.*

First, **THE GLORY OF GOD**:—*Such are Laws*, to secure, as far as possible, the honour of God, his *name*, his *worship*, his *ordinances*, from being made light of, and profaned, by men who are given over to a reprobate mind.

• Prov. xvi. 12.

• Wisd. ii. 11.

*Such also are laws*, to secure true religion, and its ministers, from contempt, by punishing those that, forgetting themselves and their character, make the service of God to be despised: and by encouraging and securing the rights of such as serve faithfully at the altar against the sacrilegious attempts of covetous men.

*Such are laws*, which are proper to prevent wicked men from corrupting the principles and manners of weak and ignorant people; by punishing the crimes against the majesty of the great God, with *at least* the same degree of severity as crimes against the civil governors or private men.

And here, it must not be passed over in silence, that too many come amongst us, who bring all those evil dispositions and bad qualities along with them, which were the cause of their misfortunes at home.

Now; too many of these, instead of enjoying the happiness of a safe and undisturbed retreat and liberty, set up for directors or censurers of our magistrates and constitution both in church and state; ridiculing the religion and discipline established amongst us; meddling with matters they do not understand; and, which is still worse, corrupting our youth with the basest examples of debauchery and profaneness; making a mock of sin; propagating the very vilest opinions; hardening young people against the advice of friends, against their own interest, and the fear of God and damnation.

And a sad truth it is—these, many of them, meet with too much countenance and encouragement, for the sake, as is pretended, of the advantages we receive from them.

Whether any advantages of this kind will countervail for the dishonour done to God, the mischiefs done to our people, and the judgments we have to fear, is what should very seriously be considered by all such as wish for the continuance of the happiness of this place.

The express condition of King Solomon's prosperity was this—"If thou wilt execute my judgments, then will I perform my word which I spake unto David thy father." And the only security which the people of God had for *their* prosperity and God's blessing was this—"That thou put away evil from among you."

From all which it appears, not from *our* reasoning, but from the infallible Word of God, that the welfare and happiness of nations depend upon the restraint that is put upon vice and impiety, by good and wholesome laws, whereby the honour of God is secured from contempt.

And



And indeed wherever God has placed any share of power or authority, it is for this very end, that he may not be provoked, by the dishonour done to *him* and *his* laws, to pour down his judgments upon men and nations.

Next to the glory of God, the great end of laws and of civil government is, THE GOOD OF MANKIND; to secure the persons, the properties, and the peace of honest and well-meaning men, against the power, or the craft, of such as would invade or disturb them.

It is a good deal more than an hundred years since the historian, Mr. Camden, gave the following account of the people of this isle:—"The inhabitants in general," says he, "have a very good character; not given either to *lewdness*, *cheating*, or *thievery*; so that every man possesseth his own in peace and safety; none living in fear of losing what he has."—"This island," the historian adds, "is happier on another account than we are in England; for the people are free from vexatious and unnecessary law-suits; from long and dilatory pleas, and from frivolous feeing of lawyers, proctors, and attornies; all controversies being determined, without long process, every man pleading his own cause *viva voce*."

Now this, we are too sure, is neither the case nor the character of the times we live in. Very late and melancholy instances we have had to the contrary.—Many honest men's properties have been invaded, some by force, and some by fraud. The civil magistrate can tell us, how very litigious the people are grown of late, to the great increase of his burthen, and the expence of his time; and the people, too many of them, have smarted by the mal-practice of such as live and gain by contention. The ecclesiastical magistrate meets every day with new, and heretofore unheard-of, instances of the contempt of God and of religion.

Whether it be for want of better laws, to put a stop to these growing evils, with which an holy and righteous God must be highly displeased; or for any other cause, it will be worth the care of the legislature, *in the first place*, to make more effectual provision, that God in all things may be glorified, ever remembering, *that there is neither wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the Lord*; that is, where there is not a regard to his honour.

But even the best laws that *can be made* will be of little use, unless they are faithfully put in execution, and by men of religion and integrity.

It was said of the Athenians, (as a learned man has observed) that they shewed a great deal of wisdom in making excellent laws, but a much greater folly in not observing them; and this was owing, in a great measure, to the negligence or corruption of the inferior magistrates. This the Romans took care to prevent in the beginning of their commonwealth, by requiring, under the severest penalties, that magistrates should be examples of that behaviour which they required of others. "If this," saith their great lawyer Cicero, "if this be observed, we have all that we can wish for."

And indeed it is the highest false step that men in power and authority can make, to give any manner of countenance to men of wicked lives, or of loose and wicked principles. For, to be sure, that man who makes light of God, of his word and laws, will, when he can do it with impunity, despise the magistrate, who is God's representative, and those laws which are made by him for the good government of the world.

Magistrates therefore, and all in authority, are above all others obliged to be upon their guard, because the lesser world will too readily follow their example, especially if bad, for so the corruption of human nature, which is prone to evil continually, will lead them too forcibly.

And what will be the natural consequence of this? Why, the fear of God will be forgotten; men will be left to themselves, and to the conduct of Satan; pride and luxury will follow; and to support these, covetousness, injustice, fraud, and knavery, will succeed; as also a litigious temper, a disregard for oaths, perjury, and oppressing one another; and lastly, which must ever be remembered by people of any consideration, *the judgments of God* upon a sinful nation, if these sins go unpunished; which they will be too apt to do, if the magistrate himself is wanting to his duty to him whom he represents.

To prevent this, it should be considered, that no one man on earth can claim the obedience of others by any natural right of his own, but as he is invested with authority and power from God, who has ordained some to govern, and for that end to make righteous laws; and others to obey, and this on pain of his great displeasure.

If this were considered as it should be, those in authority would always govern with truth and justice; and such whose duty it is to obey, would obey for conscience' sake.

It was a powerful argument which Joseph, then governor of all Egypt, made use of to his



his brethren, who, not knowing him, were in the utmost fear for their lives and liberty: "This do," says he, "and live; for I fear God." That is, you may expect nothing but justice from one who professes to live in the fear of God. And what a powerful influence will this naturally have upon those who seek for justice?

When a man is secure of the magistrate's integrity, and that he shall not suffer in his rights, either by *partiality*, *corruption*, or the overbearing power of others, he will depend upon the justice of his cause, without employing men of no conscience to puzzle or mislead the magistrate with false assertions, suspected evidences, and doubtful precedents not warranted by law or justice.

And here I cannot but mention a passage which we have recorded in Scripture, to the praise of the greatest Prince then on earth, as we find it in Esther i. 15; the King asks this question of his counsellors, "What shall we do unto the Queen according to law?" How careful was this mighty Prince to do nothing which the law would not justify; and set a rare example of justice to all about him, to make the law the rule of his conscience, and conscience the rule of his conduct!

Thus stands the duty of superiors with respect to their inferiors.

But there is another branch of duty, and a very important one, which, in a more especial manner, regards the honour and laws of God, as we before hinted.

The will of God is, That the laws which he has given for setting forth his own glory, and for the good of mankind, should be revered and obeyed by all;—that sin be made uneasy to those upon whom reason and the fear of God have no effect;—that wickedness of every kind be punished according to the nature of the offence;—that the evil examples of such as scorn to be hypocrites in impiety, who make a mock of sin and damnation, and glory in making profelytes to Satan, that such be hindered by the severest penalties from corrupting others;—that growing vices be carefully

P Gen. xlii. 18.

observed, and a timely stop put to them, before they become too many or too strong to be cured by any methods, except national judgments.

These are the undoubted duties of the Civil Magistrate, who, being in the place of God, stands bound to make his will the rule of his actions, remembering the account he must one day give.

For our part, we are in duty bound, to keep awake the consciences of men with the remembrance of God's glorious attributes, and of a judgment to come;—of his all-seeing eye;—of his justice and vengeance upon hardened sinners;—of his power to destroy both body and soul in hell;—of the sad and certain consequence of dishonest gain;—of the wasting vices of idleness and luxury;—of the damning sin of blaspheming the name of the great God;—of the great evil of vexatious controversies, and giving men trouble without cause;—and lastly, of the absolute necessity of making restitution for injuries done our neighbour, to the best of our power, as ever we hope for salvation.

To conclude:—Let these things be considered as they should be, and we shall soon see the happy effects of taking God along with us, in all our actions and councils.

They that are in a superior rank will remember, that they are in the place of God, and will be careful not to bring contempt on him whose place they supply; the fear and regard for God and his laws being the best support of their own authority.

On the other side; they that are to obey will consider, that their superiors are in the place of God, and are bound to consult his glory; their obedience, therefore, will be more chearful, their behaviour peaceable; and thankful will they be for the blessing of such a government.

And may God, the great governor of the world, give all his substitutes grace and a spirit to discern what will be most for his glory, and such as he will approve of at the great day; through Jesus Christ our Lord; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory. *Amen.*



## S E R M O N L.

BEFORE THE COURT OF TINWALD, 1728.

## THE SUPPRESSION OF VICE AND IMPIETY, THE DUTY OF ALL PERSONS IN AUTHORITY.

GENESIS vi. 1, 2, 3, 7.

*And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them; that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were fair: and they took them wives of all which they chose. And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man.—And the Lord said, I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth, &c.<sup>a</sup>*

THIS text will be better understood, and will have no difficulty in it, when it is read according to the most antient versions and paraphrases, which thus render or explain the Hebrew:—*And it came to pass, when men began to multiply upon the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them; that the sons of the sovereigns (who in Holy Scripture are called Gods) seeing the daughters of the inferior sort, that they were fair, they took them by force, and ravished them at their pleasure;*—which thing was so provoking in the sight of God, that he declares [ver. 7.] “I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth;”—which accordingly he did by the flood.

Why was God so provoked with *these* sins, and *these* sinners, above all others?—There must be something very singular, and very provoking, which could draw down so amazing, and so general a judgment upon the whole race of mankind.—And the reason was plainly this,—*The utter improbability that ever there would be a reformation, that ever the world would mend;*—since they that were in power, and in the place of God, and whose duty it was to restrain and punish wickedness, were the very persons who promoted vice, by suffering it to go unpunished in their own children and families, or by their own evil example gave countenance to it; so that there was no way left to cure the evil, but by destroying the sinners.

And that *this* was the very cause of so universal a judgment is plain, from other instances of divine vengeance recorded in Sacred Scripture, which were *then* executed, when wickedness became so universal that there were none to punish or to restrain it.

This was the case of Sodom, and the neighbouring cities; they were destroyed by fire from heaven: And that posterity might not be ignorant of the cause of so terrible a judgment, the Sacred Scripture is so particular as to inform us, [Gen. xix. 5.] “that all the people both old and young,” that is, both fathers and their children, both magistrates and the common people, were gathered together from every quarter, to commit a sin abominable to be named.

This is plain from God’s own declaration, [ch. xviii. 32.] “If there be found TEN RIGHTEOUS PERSONS amongst them;” that is, if there be any amongst them who will execute justice and judgment upon the wicked, so that there may be any possibility of a reformation, “I will not destroy them, “I will spare the whole for their sakes.”

There was indeed one, and but one, who had the heart or the courage to reprove them; but he wanted power to restrain them; and the people plainly told him so: “This one fellow came to sojourn amongst us, and he will needs be judge;” that is, he will take upon him to reprove, and to restrain us; “now will we deal worse with thee than with them.”

Now; here being no possibility of a reformation, when they who should have put a stop to the wickedness were at the head of those that committed it; Almighty God interposed his power, and utterly destroyed them by fire from heaven.

The Scripture saith expressly of the people of Laish: “That there was no magistrate to put any man to shame in any thing.” And the very next thing we hear

<sup>a</sup> See Matth. v. 13. Mark xiii. 14. Luke xvii. 27. 2 Chron. xv. 1, 2, 3. xvii. 8, 9, 10. Ps. xii. 1. Ezek. xxii. 25, 26, 27, 30. xxxiii. Jer. v. 1. Hosea iv. Wisd. v. 23. <sup>b</sup> Gen. xix. 9. <sup>c</sup> Judges xviii. 7.



of them is, *that they were utterly, every soul of them, destroyed.*

Another instance we have in the ruin of the whole tribe of Benjamin, except a very few men." There had been a most abominable sin committed by some sons of Belial; the rest of the tribes desired that those men might be punished as they deserved, so that God's judgments might be turned away from the whole land. This righteous demand was denied; and they that should have punished them took part with them. And the consequence was, they became partners with them in their utter destruction, which soon after followed.

And to add no more instances—this one declaration of God, by his Prophet, shews plainly, what are the true causes of general judgments upon any land.

God, for the sins of the Jews, had resolved to send them into captivity; and to shew them the cause of their approaching misery, he bids the Prophet Jeremiah, [chap. v. 1.] "See now and know, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth, and I will pardon them." It seems there were none such to be found, and their calamity and captivity very soon followed.

And as the negligence or wickedness of those in authority did, in these and many other instances, provoke God to pour down his judgments; so has the zeal of magistrates, either in punishing offenders, or in bringing men to repentance, saved whole nations from destruction. Thus we have it,\* "Then stood up Phineas, and executed judgment, and so the plague was stayed."

And when God had fully determined, and *within a limited time*, to destroy the city of Nineveh, he was prevailed on to defer the execution of that judgment, by the King's proclamation, "That every one should turn from his evil way;" the King himself setting them the good example, "covering himself with sackcloth, sitting in ashes, and crying mightily to God."

This would now be made a jest of, and even by some who call themselves Christians. A King in SACKCLOTH AND ASHES! Yes, any thing rather than the vengeance of God upon his kingdom, than provoke him *who can destroy both body and soul in hell.*

But to proceed:—The very condition of King Solomon's prosperity, and of the continuance of the crown in his family, was this: "If thou wilt execute my judgments, then will I perform my word which I spake unto David thy father."<sup>z</sup>

\* Judges xix. 20.  
† Jonah iii. 6.

\* Ps. cvi. 30.  
z 1 Kings vi. 12.

And the only security which the people of God had for the continuance of his protection and blessing, was the often repeated condition, "If thou put away evil from among you." This was *their*, and this is *our*, best and only security.

From what has been said, it appears, not from *our* reasoning, but from the infallible word of God, That the welfare and happiness of nations depend upon their obedience to the laws of God and nature, and upon the restraint that is put upon vice and impiety, by such as are commissioned by God in his place.

And indeed, wherever God has placed any share of power and authority, it is for this very end—to keep the world in order, that he may not be provoked by their wickedness to send his judgments upon them.

From hence also it follows, that the sins of private people become the sins of the whole nation, and are the cause of national judgments, when the guilty continue unpunished by those who should call them to an account.

It is for this reason that the government of England, at this very time,<sup>a</sup> has ordered, *that certain abominable sins shall be prosecuted at the expence of the crown*; concluding, very truly, that when justice and judgment are duly executed upon wicked men, by such as have authority, God will not plague that nation, however he may punish particular offenders.

It behoves therefore every body, to whom God has imparted any share of his power and authority, from the King that sitteth upon the throne to the lowest; it behoves them, as they value the honour of God, the welfare of the society, or their own salvation, to make use of that power to discountenance and to punish vice and impiety.

Now; the authority which men have from God to restrain or punish sin, is either *natural, ecclesiastical, or civil.*

God has given PARENTS a power over their own children and families; and a great deal they may do, if they have any grace themselves, towards reforming the world, by a sober and good example; by bringing up their children in the fear of God; by stifling the seeds of corrupt nature when they first begin to spring up; and, by salutary chastisements, making every degree of sin uneasy to them, until they shall be able to understand the danger of sin with respect to another world.

And a sad account parents will have to make, if instead of doing so, they suffer

<sup>a</sup> In the Year 1728.

their



their children, as they grow in years, to grow in sin; and either by an evil example, or by furnishing them with means of nourishing their natural corruptions, they leave a generation behind them more wicked than themselves.

But when parents (as it happens too often) do prove thus unnatural to their own children; God in mercy has provided other means to instruct, and to reclaim them, if men are not extremely wanting to their duty.

And these are, *first*, HIS MINISTERS, who are commissioned to teach, and to administer the means of grace and salvation to all such as are willing to receive them:

And *secondly*, HIS MAGISTRATES, who have their power from him to restrain and to punish such as will not be taught and governed by milder means, by the ministry of the Word, and the discipline of the Church.

It is certain, that the WELL-BEING of the world, if not its SUBSISTING, depends upon the due and faithful exercise of these TWO POWERS. It will therefore be very proper to consider the duties both of those that are appointed by God to exercise these powers, and of those that are bound to obey them.

We will first consider the powers which God, by his Son Jesus Christ, has given to HIS MINISTERS, in order to regulate the manners of Christians, and to keep men from bringing ruin upon themselves by their wickedness.

Their *Commission* is recorded by St. Matthew [ch. xxviii.] in these words: "Go ye, faith our Lord to his Apostles, "and make "disciples to me in all nations, baptising "them, and teaching them to observe all "things whatsoever I have commanded you; "and lo! I am with you alway even unto "the end of the world;" that is, with them and their successors.

Jesus Christ knew very well to what a perverse world he sent them; and therefore, to guard them and his own authority and commission from contempt, he declares, that he will always look upon himself as injured, in the contempt any one shews to his Ministers: "He that despiseth you, despiseth me, and him that sent me."

But does their power consist in this only, to teach men their duty, and to set before them the terrors of the world to come; and so to leave them to themselves?—Very far from it. God has been more merciful to his poor creatures; and knowing how subject men are to sin, to forfeit his favour, and to make themselves liable to his anger, both

in this world and the next; he has therefore invested his Ministers with the power of discipline; that is, with a power not only to exhort and to rebuke with all authority; but to put away from among Christians such as are an offence and a scandal to their profession, and to hinder them from ruining others. And he must be a person of a very profane spirit, who would set light by an ordinance which has God for its author, as Church Discipline most certainly has.

St. Paul's epistles are an unquestionable proof of this; and the practice of the pure primitive church shewed how useful it was for the keeping the Christian world in some tolerable order.

The Church of England (in her office of commination) passionately wishes, *That this godly discipline may be restored; that notorious sinners may be put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls may be saved in the day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, may be more afraid to offend.*

This Church, God be praised for it, is in possession of this discipline, in some good measure; and if, through the malice of the Devil, and the perverseness of men, it has not always those saving effects which we could wish, and do pray for, this is no more an objection against the discipline of the church, than it is against Christianity itself, or any of its ordinances, which are but too often abused by wicked men.

Must we therefore renounce Christianity, and neglect its ordinances? God forbid. Rather let us take more pains to make our people truly sensible of the blessing of Christianity, and of the reason of that discipline, which is designed, under God, to preserve it. For example:—

That the Church is Christ's family;—that all who are admitted into this family do solemnly promise to live as becomes so holy a society;—that such as after this do become disorderly livers, and will not be reformed, ought to be turned out of the church, till they become sensible of their error;—that while they obstinately continue in that condition, they are deprived of all the means of grace, and hopes of salvation.

That as sure as Baptism is the gate of salvation, and a real blessing, so sure is Excommunication a real punishment, and to be dreaded more than any temporal punishment on earth: And it would certainly be so; and it would be the most powerful means of restraining vice and impiety, if Christians would but consider, that although it be a sentence passed by men, yet it is a sentence

• Luke x. 16.

• 1 Tim. v. 13. • In the Isle of Man. • John vi. 53.



passed by men commissioned by God, and who are answerable to God, if their sentence be not worthy of *him*, and agreeable to his word:—

Even as the Civil Magistrate has, by God's word, a right to do, *in civil matters*, whatever he judges necessary and lawful for the good of the society over which he is set.

And if either the Civil or Ecclesiastical Magistrate mistake in their duty, or willfully follow their own humour, they are answerable to God. And all that we have to do, if there be no superior to appeal to for redress, is to submit with patience, always remembering, that *this is not the world we were made for*; which will help to render the troubles of this short life more easy to be borne.

In short; Church Discipline is necessary, as it is appointed by Jesus Christ. The ends proposed by it are, to reform wicked men, to remove scandals, and to prevent the judgments of God;—and to obstruct, or to discountenance it, is to oppose an order of God for the good of the world, and for the salvation of particular men;—a sin which will draw after it great judgments.

And sad experience may convince us, that where church censures are set at nought, or ridiculed, the most damnable sins become the subject of mirth and laughter, rather than of horror, sorrow, and shame. A sure symptom of approaching judgments, when men are not content to neglect their own salvation, but take pains to pervert and ruin others!

And this brings me to consider the duty of private Christians, with respect to the discipline of the church, as it regards the suppression of vice and impiety, the subject we are upon.

And for this we have express rules in the Word of God. “We command you,” (saith St. Paul, 2 Theff. iii. 6.) “We command you, by the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother,” that is, every Christian, “that walketh disorderly.” And in case of obstinacy, he gives this farther order; “Note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”

So that as sure as this is God's Word, there is nothing which Christians ought more carefully to avoid, *than the giving of countenance to disorderly livers.*

But this is not all: “They that sin, (saith the same Apostle) rebuke before all;” for this reason, “that others also may fear.” And surely Christians, who are not afraid for themselves when they see others called

to an account for their sins, are not far from falling into the same, or into greater sins themselves.

To conclude, therefore, this head of our discourse:—When discipline is administered, and obeyed, according to these rules of the Gospel, it must be one of the most effectual means of bringing sinners out of the snare of the Devil, of restraining vice, and averting impending judgments; and therefore, being an institution of the Gospel, is not to be set aside by any human law.

This will not depreciate the use of human laws, or the authority of the Civil Magistrate, which being another appointment of God, for the punishment of vice and impiety, is now to be considered.

It is very sure, that men will not always be governed by motives of reason, religion, and conscience; if they would, there would be no need of any other authority than that of Church Discipline, and the Laws of the Gospel, to keep the world in order. But the good of the commonwealth requires, that such as will not be governed by religion and conscience, shall be restrained by outward force.

God has therefore given authority to the Civil Magistrate over the persons, estates, and even over the lives of men, to keep them from doing mischief to the publick, and from ruining themselves.

But then this does not supercede, or make unnecessary, the use of Church Discipline; for no Christian sure can be so absurd as to imagine, that because a man has been punished by the Civil Magistrate, for *stealing*, or for *drunkenness*, or for *perjury*, or any other crime, that therefore he is qualified to receive the Holy Communion, or that he ought to be admitted to it, without giving marks of his repentance. This would be (with a witness) *to give that which is holy unto dogs*, contrary to our Lord's command; and to prostitute religion, and its mysteries, to the utmost contempt, and scorn of infidels.

And therefore my Lord Coke very justly reasons, when he saith, “that the Ecclesiastical and Temporal Laws have several ends; the one to inflict punishment upon the body, to punish the outward man; the other to reform the inward,—that both may be reformed.”

For nobody ever questioned, but that the Civil Magistrates have their authority from God for this end, “That knowing whose Ministers they are, they may above all things seek God's honour and glory; that they may truly and indifferently minister justice, to the punishment of wickedness

<sup>1</sup> See Codex Eccl. Angl. p. 1077.



“and vice, and to the maintenance of true religion and virtue.”

And their power will go a great way towards the doing of this. For instance:—

They can encourage such only as are good and virtuous, and take care that profaneness and impiety shall never be thought any qualification for favour or preferment.

They can put marks of disesteem, and of infamy, if it be necessary, upon such as dishonour God and religion by their wicked lives.

They can take care, that sins against God shall always be punished, at least with as great severity as those against men; or else God has given them a share of his own power to very little purpose.

They can take care, that the laws which are made for the punishment of vice, and for the support of religion, be duly executed: And they will find it their interest, as well as duty, to do so, lest the example prove fatal to their own authority.

If they see wickedness increase, they can search into the cause of it; and if it is in their power (as generally it is) they can put a stop to growing vices; or else they do, in some sort, command what is in their power to prevent.

If *drunkenness*, for instance, or *whoredom*, or *profaning the Lord's Day*, become reigning vices, they who are clothed with the authority of God, and zealous for his honour, will not find it difficult to discover the causes of such corruption, if they have a mind to remove them.

If *profaneness*, and *making a jest of religion*, and of every thing that has relation to God, if these vices prevail, a magistrate will easily see, that the surest foundation of his own authority is undermined, and will take timely care to prevent the mischiefs that may follow.

They can take care, that such as are in the way of their duty, and doing all in their power to suppress impiety, shall have proper assistance, countenance, and encouragement, and shall be secured from the insults of wicked men.

And especially they have it in their power, to set a good example of seriousness, sobriety, of justice, truth, and piety; always remembering, that there is not a greater affront to the Divine Majesty, than for a man to make use of the authority which he has received from God, to the dishonour of him whose substitute he is.

And if the Athenian Lawgiver had reason for this maxim, That the magistrate should

obey the laws, as well as the people the magistrate, as they expected the government to last long;—if this was true reasoning with respect to human laws, much more is it necessary to be observed with respect to the laws of God. For the Law of God knows no respect of persons; all are subject to its sanctions; none are exempt from its penalties; and they that escape them here are sure to meet with them hereafter.

And indeed it would be a most *mischievous privilege*, with regard to the publick, if any one might sin without rebuke, and consequently draw down judgments upon the whole community. This was the very case of the Israelites: “Did not Achan sin,” saith the Scripture, “and wrath fell upon the whole congregation?” which could not be stayed till he had not only suffered for his iniquity, but *had given glory to God* in a free confession of his sin; acknowledging, that God is to be feared more than all earthly powers, and his judgments to be dreaded more than death.

From which Christians may see, that if Ministers and Magistrates should neglect their duty, and should forbear to call offenders to an account, yet this would indeed be no favour; unless we should be so weak as to think it an advantage to avoid shame and trouble in this life, which we may have justly deserved, and to meet with confusion and punishment eternal in the next.

Punishment is the due reward of sin; and every sin must be punished either here or hereafter; and, although the punishments and censures which either the Magistrate or the Church inflict, have not always their wished-for and saving effects, yet they are neither of them to be laid aside for that reason, or despised. They will always have this good effect; they will stop the judgments of God from falling upon the society, while the governors thereof, who are in the place of God, do take care to punish wickedness. They have this good effect besides; those in power do their duty, and deliver their own souls.

And if we enquire into the reasons why punishments and censures have not their due and saving effects, we shall find, that it is owing *chiefly* to the countenance sinners meet with from such as should avoid them, as the Spirit of God expressly requires them to do.

A sinner must be strangely hardened indeed, who, being denied the means of salvation, and the free conversation of all sober Christians, and the comforts of society, is not awakened, by the want of these blessings, into a sense of his interest and duty.

And as sure as *this Gospel* which I have in my hand is true, this is true;—that to



countenance notorious evil livers, or such as rebel against that discipline which Christ has ordained for the salvation of sinners, is "to be partakers with them in their evil deeds."<sup>2</sup> And they will sooner or later, without a bitter repentance, share in their punishment.

It is indeed to make a jest of sin, of God's Word, and his threats therein contained;—it is to make a mock of hell and damnation.

It is just doing what the Israelite did,<sup>b</sup> in bringing a Moabitish woman in the sight of Moses, and the whole congregation: As if men were not only not afraid of men, nor of God, but as if they defied *him*, *his* authority, and *his* anger;—as if they were resolved to live in the profession of Christianity with all the vices of heathens, on purpose to make the Christian religion more contemptible.

These are generally the *last sins*; and when it is come to this, men are then filling up the measure of their iniquities.

But to return to our subject. God is the Author and Fountain of Authority, both in

<sup>2</sup> 2 John x. 11. <sup>b</sup> Numb. xxv.

the Church and in the State; these must therefore support one another in all lawful things, or both of them will suffer. And then, and then only, they answer the end of their institution, and the order of providence, when both concur to promote the honour of God, to suppress the growing vices of the age, and to prevent the wicked from infecting the good.

And one would think it should be as reasonable to keep notorious sinners from corrupting others, as it is to prevent such as have the plague from infecting those that have it not.

To conclude:—Whoever does prevent any degree of sin, does certainly prevent some degree of judgments and misery to a nation; and is so far a benefactor.

May it please God to awaken all that are in authority, whether in Church or State, and make us sensible that we are answerable for all the sins which it is in our power to prevent, and that we have more souls besides our own to answer for.

Now to God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N L I.

BEFORE THE COURT OF TINWALD, 1725.

### THE DUTY OF MAGISTRATES.

DEUT. i. 17.

*Ye shall not be afraid of the face of Man; for the Judgment is God's.<sup>1</sup>*

**T**HIS is part of that *solemn charge* which Moses gave to the Judges of Israel.—The same in effect did good King Jehosaphat give to his Judges;<sup>2</sup> "Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in the judgment; wherefore, let the fear of the Lord be upon you."

If this charge was necessary *then*, it certainly is so *now*, and will ever be so, as long as men are subject to *weakness*, to *negligence*, to *corruption*, or to *passion*; that is, as long as this world lasts.

The words of the text suppose this, *Ye shall not be afraid of the face of man*; and proposes the only effectual antidote against such an evil, *for the judgment is God's*.

The words are few, but imply a great deal of instruction.

First; THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S. Why then *the magistrate's power and authority is from God*.

Secondly; YE SHALL NOT BE AFRAID OF THE FACE OF MAN. This teaches the Magistrate *his* duty; namely, that he is not to pervert justice for any worldly consideration; no, not for the fear of death.

Thirdly; the subject may here see the sin and danger of *opposing*, of *disobeying*, of *villifying*, the Magistrate in the due execution of his office. He is God's Minister; his judgment, if just, is the very judgment which God would give; God is with him in the judgment, and will certainly avenge him if he is despised.

And these are the things that I would, at this time, recommend to your consideration, in as few words as I can possibly express my meaning.

<sup>1</sup> See Exod. xviii. 21. xxiii. 3. Deut. i. 16. Isaiah xxix. 21. xxx. 1. Amos v. 10. Gal. i. 10. Prov. xxi. 30. xvi. 12. xix. 4, 12, 14, 25. xxx. 4, 5. 1 Tim. ii. 2.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Chron. xix. 6.



And first, for *the authority of the Magistrate*. St. Paul tells us plainly, "The powers that be are ordained of God." They are, it is true, *men of like passions with ourselves*; but that does not hinder them from being God's representatives. They are expressly called in Holy Scripture, GOD'S MINISTERS.<sup>m</sup> "By me," saith Solomon, "by me Kings reign, and all the Judges of the earth;" that is, from God they have their power. "He, therefore, that resisteth, resisteth not man, but God."

And this is the Magistrate's great security, especially amongst Christians, who all know, or should know, that disobedience to the lawful commands of a lawful magistrate will be attended with the severest punishment.—For "they that resist," saith the Apostle, "shall receive to themselves damnation."

In short; God, the author of life and death, the great proprietor of all things, has given to certain persons power over the bodies, goods, estates, and even lives, of their fellow-creatures; but then, lest these magistrates, finding themselves vested with so much power, should be tempted to abuse it, all nations, after the example of God's people, and by his will, have agreed upon laws to restrain and direct them.

And most nations, particularly this of our's, have made the law of God, by Moses to the Israelites, their pattern.

Now, if the Magistrate judge and govern according to these laws, that is God's will and judgment; so that both the magistrate and people are answerable to God; the one, if he makes not the law his rule, and the other, if they live not in all dutiful obedience to those whom the providence of God has set over them.

And therefore the Apostle adds, that we must obey authority—not only for *wrath*, that is, for fear of temporal punishment; but also for *conscience sake*; that is, out of regard to the law and will of God.

And happy it is, both for the magistrate and the people, that there are such laws in every society, that both the one and the other may have a rule to go by, a rule which does or should always speak the same language—to the *poor* and to the *rich*; to *friends* and *enemies*; to those that are *wise*, and to them that are *simple* and see not their interest.

It was for this reason, that the Heathens represented Justice with a veil over her face, intimating that a righteous Judge ought never to consider the *person*, but the *cause*, that is before him.

And certainly there is no better way for a Magistrate to secure the obedience and re-

gard of the people, than to let them see, that they who are appointed to *give the law*, are themselves governed by *law*, and not by their own inclinations or wills. For the laws of all nations do suppose, that magistrates may be mistaken in their judgment, either through fear or favour, or negligence, or ignorance, or through weakness or corruption; and therefore all laws have, as far as it is in the power of man, provided a remedy against such evils—by allowing an appeal from every *inferior* to a *superior* court.

St. Paul himself, than whom no inspired writer ever pressed obedience to government more earnestly, when he was most unjustly prosecuted for a faithful discharge of his duty to God, *he appealed unto Cæsar*, as to the last power, and next under God, from whom he might expect a more equitable sentence.

Let us now consider, *the ends for which magistrates have this great power given them by God*. And these are, in short, *the Glory of God*, and *the good of their fellow-creatures*.

It is for this reason, that in our daily prayers we beseech God, so to dispose and govern the hearts of such as are in authority, that they, knowing whose ministers they are, may above all things, and in the first place, seek God's honour and glory; and in the next place, study to preserve the people under them in wealth, peace, and godliness. And every Magistrate, that has not these things in his view, will have but a sad account to make to God, whose minister he is.

It is certain, all our laws were intended to secure these two ends; THE HONOUR OF GOD, by punishing the breach of his laws, by penalties suitable to the nature of the offence; and THE GOOD OF EVERY MAN, by securing every man in the possession of his rights, till a better right appeared.

I wish one could say the same of all our Precedents; but the reason of the difference is very plain:—*Laws* are generally made with good advice, and with a view to the publick good; but *precedents* are too often made with a view to particular interests, and sometimes by men of weak judgments; so that the reproach cast upon the commonwealth of Athens may too fitly be applied to other nations; namely, that their great wisdom appeared in their excellent laws, and their folly in taking pains to pervert them.

To prevent this, the Kings and Lords of this Isle first instituted THIS COURT OF TINWALD, that all inferior magistrates might have an opportunity of justifying their conduct, if they had acted uprightly, and agreeably to law, and might receive a just rebuke,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiii.    <sup>m</sup> Rom. xiii. 6.    <sup>n</sup> Prov. viii. 15.



rebuke, if complaint were made that they had acted otherwise.

And this is exactly agreeable to an ordinance of the ancient Romans, which made that commonwealth so prosperous: For, to prevent carelessness, corruption, or negligence, in the interpretation or execution of the laws, the Judges were obliged to lay their acts before the Censors, that nothing might remain on record, but what the law should warrant.

A very excellent method, every body must own; and yet every Christian magistrate has much stronger obligations upon him, to be most exactly careful in the administration of justice:—*Ye judge not for man*, neither for his approbation, nor for fear of his censure, *but for the Lord*. The JUDGMENT IS GOD'S, faith the text; that is, it ought to be the very same judgment, if possible, that God himself would give. At least, a good magistrate must have this testimony of his integrity, that he honestly intend to give a judgment worthy of God, in whose place he stands;—a judgment which he hopes God will approve of, and which his conscience will never reprove him for.

That it may be so, it is necessary, that every magistrate should not only, as in Jehoshaphat's charge, *take heed what he does*; that is, be very careful to inform himself what is the law, and what is the case concerning which he is to give judgment; but it is also necessary, that he let no worldly consideration take possession of his heart. The text faith, YE SHALL NOT BE AFRAID OF THE FACE OF MAN;—and the truth is, that magistrate, who fears or hopes for any thing more than the approving himself to God, has a bias upon his judgment that will certainly lead him to be unjust.

We have a remarkable instance of this sin and weakness, in the person of Pilate. He was very desirous to release Jesus, finding no fault in him which could deserve death. The chief priests, perceiving this, and knowing his weak side, cried out, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend;" that is, in other words, though you find no fault in him, yet if you do not condemn him, you shall be represented as an enemy to Cæsar.—Well, what followed? Why, the most execrable piece of wickedness that ever Judge was guilty of. The Evangelist tells us, *that when Pilate heard that saying*,—that is, that he was in danger of losing his master's favour, by following his conscience, and doing justice,—he gave sentence, that it should be as *they desired*; not as justice required, or as his own conscience suggested.

And as all wickedness is folly, this was so in the highest degree: For, first, he owned

by this act, that he was capable of being frightened out of his duty, than which there could not be fixed upon him a greater reproach; and secondly, he most egregiously affronted that master whose displeasure he feared, by supposing that he could be pleased with a wicked action,—the death of an innocent person. And the providence of God very soon convinced him of his sin and mistake; for, notwithstanding all his care not to lose Cæsar's favour, he fell under his displeasure, was banished, and, wanting the comfort of a good conscience, he made away with himself.

And thus it will ever be, when men forget THAT THE JUDGMENT IS GOD'S, and that to God they are accountable. When they forget this, interest will prevail with them,—friendship will gain upon them,—passion will hurry them into error,—bribes will blind their eyes,—or, what the world will say will influence them.

*I set God always before me*, was the maxim of the best of Kings: And every man, and every magistrate especially, must do so too, who would never do any thing unworthy of God; and the neglect of doing so, is the occasion of all the mischiefs committed and complained of.

How seasonable, therefore, is the advice of the Wise Man,\* "Seek not to be Judge, "being not able to take away iniquity, lest "thou fear the person of the mighty, and "lay a stumbling-block in the way of thy "uprightness."

But that the magistrate's judgment *be worthy of God*, it is necessary that he do not only *mean uprightly himself*, but that he take especial care that he be not imposed upon by *designing men*.

The generality of those that take upon them to manage causes, have nothing so much in view as their *own gain*. Let a cause be never so unrighteous, they will undertake it. Let the law be never so plain, they will endeavour to pervert it. Let a jury be never so well-disposed to follow the truth, they will endeavour to lead them astray.

A magistrate, therefore, has need to be very patient, and very resolute; *patient* in finding out the truth, which such managers endeavour to hide from him, and *resolute* in following it, in spite of all their clamours.

The complaints of those that suffer by these sort of people, both in their peace and in their rights, should, one would hope, awaken the government to *regulate* at least, if not to *silence* them; and to bring us back to our old constitution, WHERE EVERY MAN PLEADED HIS OWN CAUSE; the simplest

\* Eccclus. vii. 6.



man being as able to tell his own story to a magistrate as to an attorney; and a magistrate will be better able to judge where the truth lies, when facts are laid nakedly before him without design of imposing upon him.

We have hitherto considered the magistrate's duty with respect to his fellow-creatures:—But there is another branch of his duty, and a very important one, which regards the honour and the laws of God.

Every magistrate, whether ecclesiastical or civil, stands charged with this—to *consult*, to *promote*, to *countenance*, the cause of GOD, and RELIGION; for this reason, because their authority is from God, and the obedience they claim is not from any right of their own, but as they are God's *substitutes*.

And the will of God is, That wickedness be punished,—that sin be made uneasy to men,—and that such as are not to be restrained by reason, or by the terrors of the world to come, should feel the *pain*, the *shame*, and the *punishment*, which their sins deserve in this world.

And if magistrates shall be remiss in this, they will soon see their authority undermined. For, if men be once permitted to trample upon the laws of God, they will at last trample upon that authority which should have put a stop to their wickedness. It is their *duty*, therefore, and it is their *interest*,—*To execute wrath against them that do evil*, as they are God's Ministers; (so saith the Apostle,<sup>p</sup>)—to take care of growing vices, to root them out betimes, lest they become too many and too strong to be cured by any authority or power but that of God's judgments upon the land, which will certainly fall upon us, when the magistrate either *will not*, or *cannot*, do his duty.

“The King's throne,” saith Solomon, “is established by righteousness;” that is, by doing justice, by suppressing vice, by protecting the innocent, and by succouring the distressed. This is the only true way of serving the Prince, and bringing a blessing upon the whole community; and to neglect these things is the ready way to ruin.

When the case is with any people as it was with the people of Laish;<sup>q</sup> “Who dwelt careless and secure; and there was no magistrate that might put them to shame in any thing;”—their destruction (as their's was) is near at hand; that is, when there is no prospect of a cure for the sin but by the death of the sinner.

If these things were well considered, and for that reason I leave them last upon your minds, what an influence would they have upon us all?—For instance:—

If magistrates would often consider, that they are in the place of a Judge who is infinitely *powerful*, *just*, and *holy*; they would endeavour so to conduct themselves, as that they might not bring contempt on him whose place they supply; they would be very careful never to be guilty of those vices themselves, which they are obliged to discountenance and punish in others; they would be afraid of discovering the least indifference for religion and the laws of God, or for any thing that relates to God,—the fear of God being the best support of their own authority and government.

And then, if the Magistrate considered, that *the judgment is God's*, he would make the study of justice his great concern; would desire, and take pains, to find out the truth, and follow it religiously; in doing of which he would fear no man's face, nor make any man's will his law; knowing that God can protect his own faithful servants, as well as punish those that betray the trust reposed in them.

In one word; such a magistrate will accept no man's person, court no man's favour at the price of his conscience, nor fear any man's frowns.

He will consider, that the judgment is God's; that is, what God himself would pronounce.

He will be convinced, that justice is something antecedent to his sentence, and that his duty is, not to *make*, but to *declare*, the law, and what is right or wrong.

And he will never expect to be obeyed, if he should require any thing contrary to the will of God, by whose authority he acts, and in whose place he stands.

And being in the place of God, and invested with his power, he will suffer no man to be oppressed by a powerful adversary; no advantage to be taken of men's weakness, poverty, want of help, or want of friends.

And then, if the People would consider, that the judgment is God's, and that they that pronounce it are God's Ministers, how chearful would their obedience be; how peaceable their behaviour; and how thankful for the blessing of a regular government.

And if both Magistrates and People are not thus disposed, and thus affected, woe be to them that are in fault!

May God, the Judge of all the world, give all his substitutes a spirit to discern, and courage to execute, true judgment; and grant, that all their sentences may be such as he will approve of at the great day, to the glory of his great name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.

R r r

SERMON

<sup>p</sup> Rom. xiii. 4.<sup>q</sup> Judges xviii. 7.



## S E R M O N LII.

THE TEMPTATIONS THAT LEAD TO THEFT AND ROBBERY CONSIDERED,  
WITH THE MEANS OF PREVENTING THESE CRIMES.

EXODUS XX. 15.

*Thou shalt not steal.\**

THIS which follows is the express account which the historians give of the *Isle of Man* more than one hundred years ago.—“The inhabitants in general, of this island, have a very good character, not inclined either to *lewdness*, *cheating*, or *thieving*; so that every man possesseth his own in peace and safety, none living in fear of losing what he hath.”

Were this still our case and character, I should have made choice of another subject for your edification: But necessity is laid upon us, *to preach against the growing sins of this land*, in which more people, we fear, are concerned, than are willing to believe it of themselves.

We shall consider at present—those sins only that are forbidden by the eighth commandment;—the temptations and causes that lead to such crimes;—and the way, through God’s grace and blessing, to put a stop to them, and to restore this *Isle* to its former good character, which of late (every body sees it) is much altered for the worse.

And one would hope that every Christian, who has any concern either for himself, his country, or his religion, will put his helping hand to so good a work.

The first and great cause of these, and all other vices, is the neglect of *Parents*, in not bringing up their children in the fear of God, and in not setting before them the dreadful punishments, which in the next world will most certainly be the end and reward of sin and wickedness in this life.

They often see their children take loose and idle courses;—they neglect and forbear to correct them, till sin and hell have got power over them;—they suffer them to profane the Lord’s Day, to keep idle company, to *lye*, to *take God’s name in vain*, very often without reproof, and too, too often, set them an example of doing so.

And what can be the end of this? Why, *a graceless family*, prepared for every crime

which the Devil shall think fit to tempt them to, or their own wicked inclinations can lead them to.

If their children go out to service, they make no conscience of purloining, or cheating their masters;—if they marry, they make their children and family as bad as themselves;—if they fall into bad company, they are easily tempted to any wickedness which a lewd or thievish companion can propose to them: And all this comes to pass, for want of bringing children up in the fear of God, and of God’s judgments upon wicked people.

The next great cause of the wickedness of this present generation is, the scandalous neglect of the *Ordinances of the Gospel*, and *profaning the Lord’s Day*, which is the beginning of every sin.

People will not go to church, to learn their duty, and to know their danger if they neglect it. They will not hear the judgments which God has threatened in his Holy Word against those that break his laws;—they will not pray for his grace to defend them against the temptations of the Devil, the world, and their own corrupt hearts:—And what can this end in, but in forgetting the God that made them, and who has declared, that he will call them to an account, and will punish them according to their evil deeds?

All this might in a great measure be prevented, if parents would be persuaded to bring their children, and masters their servants, to church, more constantly, to worship God, and to learn their duty; and a sure blessing would attend it.

The next cause, and sure sign, of getting bread by unlawful ways, is *an idle life*, which brings men to poverty, so that they are tempted at last to steal to supply their wants.

A man that leads an idle life, who every day spends more than he earns, who has no

\* Preached on occasion of the execution of some, and the banishment of others, for theft and robbery.

\* See Eph. iv. 28. 1 Thess. iv. 6.



visible way of getting what will answer his expences, such a person must be supposed to steal: And all who entertain such persons must know, that they are encouragers and partners with thieves; and that they receive and eat the goods of honest men, which will certainly bring a curse upon all their other honest gains.

The next cause of the sin of stealing is, *the common and growing sin of drunkenness*, and the disorderly ale-houses which such people frequent: These are the very nurseries of thieves, and of disorderly servants; the keepers of them are the receivers of stolen goods, and will be as surely accountable before God, as they that stole them.

Had these sins of drunkenness, and the lewd houses which encourage such vices, had these been duly presented, as they ought to have been, and as they formerly have been, and as the law, and the oaths of wardens oblige them to do,—it is more than probable, that some of those who are gone to account for their evil lives, might yet have been in the land of the living, and have repented, and lived to have brought forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

All such as entice servants to give their masters' goods without their masters' knowledge, would take it ill to be ranked amongst thieves; but in truth they are no better than the thieves themselves, and lead the servants to greater crimes, and too often to greater punishments.

Graceless children, and unfaithful servants, generally begin with lesser crimes of this kind, and at first abhor the thoughts of such deeds as may bring them to an untimely end; but they should consider, that the same evil spirit, which has power to tempt them to pilfer, will in time lead them to crimes which will deserve death. But this is not so well considered as it ought to be.

There is another breach of this commandment, which though in the eye of the world it is not accounted so scandalous as these we have mentioned, yet it is as heinous as any of those sins for which other men lose their lives; and this is the *sin of running of goods, and defrauding the nation of the rights and power of supporting itself*. This we have borne testimony against ever since it first began in this place; but, God knows, to very little purpose.

*Covetousness*, which is the root of this and of all other evils; the *desire of gain*, though never so unrighteously gotten; and the great power which men suffer the Devil to have over them, are the reasons and cause that this evil still continues.

And though many, very many more of these offenders have, as we all know, come

to untimely ends, more than such as have died by the hand of justice, yet it is still pursued in defiance of God and of his visible judgments. And what is the most dreadful consideration, and makes their death more terrible than that of thieves and robbers, they die in their sins, and it is much to be feared, unrepented of.

These are some of the crying sins which this Island labours under. Would to God we could as easily find out a remedy for them as we can name them! But something may be done to prevent the judgments of God from falling upon us; and to regain that worthy character which your forefathers deserved, of being an honest, harmless generation of people.

Now, there is *nothing but the fear of God* can effectually do this: nothing but what will reach and touch the heart, out of which proceedeth every evil thing, nothing else can put so effectual a stop to such growing evils.

*Temporal punishments* are certainly necessary to restrain those whom neither *law*, nor *reason*, nor *religion*, nor *shame*, nor *fear*, have power to reclaim from the wicked courses they have fallen into. And it is a duty which every man man owes to God, and to his country, to bring offenders of this kind to punishment.

It is giving glory to God, by bringing evil men to a sense of their crimes; that suffering in this world, they may, if possible, escape in the next.

It is a means to prevent such crimes in others, and to hinder the judgments of God from falling upon a sinful nation, when such sins do not escape unpunished.

It is necessary also, and for the good of private persons; for unless this be done, nothing that an honest man enjoys can be called his own; and what has been got by hard labour and honest industry, and many years' pains and care, may be taken from him in one night, and his life in danger.

But sure the best and the most Christian way would be, if possible, to prevent this, by planting *the fear of God* in the hearts of men. This would keep them honest, when no other method will do it.

Wicked men may hope to hide their ways, and escape shame and punishment by their friends, or by their craft and cunning; but a man who is persuaded, that God will bring every evil thing to judgment, will hardly go about a work which he knows will be punished with eternal damnation.

And one would hope that the most careless observer would take notice, *by what has so lately happened*, how God brings these hidden works of darkness to light, by ways which



which nobody could foresee, and which the most artful villain could not prevent.

If once we could prevail with people to pray to God along with their families, this would go a great way to cure this growing evil; children would be bred up under a sense and fear of God, and parents would be ashamed to do an ill thing before their children, with whom they are to pray before they sleep. And where masters do the same, servants would, in all probability, keep at the greatest distance from pilfering and stealing their goods, which too often leads to greater sins.

There is another consideration, which cannot too often be pressed upon the hearts and consciences of all sorts of Christians; and this is, the *absolute necessity*, where it can possibly be done, of *making restitution for the injury and wrong done to our neighbour*, as ever we hope for salvation.

What a terrible consideration will this be when it comes into the minds of men that are going to do mischief! what a check upon those that are engaged in unjust ways of getting a livelihood! *How can I make restitution for this injury?* How can I make my neighbour satisfaction for this wrong I have done, or am going to do him? Must I do this, or be shut out of heaven for ever? If shame does not hinder me, yet perhaps it will not be in my power to make amends for the wrong I have done; and knowing this before, it may be, the very impossibility will not excuse me at the great day.

I pray God graft these considerations in all our hearts, that we may appear blameless before God at *that* great day.

Another means to prevent stealing will be, for such as are able to relieve the necessities of the poor, to do it with a liberal hand, that the poor may have no temptation to steal, to support themselves and their families.—It is for this reason, amongst many others, that so many blessings are promised to such as help the poor, and so many encouragements in the Holy Scriptures to perform that duty cheerfully.

Lastly; if honest people would seriously reprove their friends and relations, when they see them take evil ways, keep bad company, spend more than they can honestly spare, this might often prevent the sorrow and the shame of seeing their relations come to an evil and shameful end.

And if such as keep disorderly ale-houses, who suffer people to drink and game in the night; who receive goods which they have reason to believe are not honestly come by, or buy them at under their value; if such people would but consider, that they are

really necessary to the untimely deaths such people as they deal with do afterwards come to; if they would consider this, it would make their hearts to tremble to think of the account they must one day give for shortening their neighbours' lives; and, for aught they know, sending them to hell.

Would to God that the words of Moses were but often in the minds of sinners, and especially of those we are speaking of;—“Ye have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out.”

Not the most secret crime, not the cunningest contrivance, not the boldest thief, not the strongest combination of sinners, can secure themselves against him whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; and who will bring to light the hidden works of darkness; and who by his Spirit has declared, that he is the avenger of all such as defraud or wrong their neighbour in any matter.

And now, good Christians, I have set before you the temptations which generally lead to these sins: *Drunkenness*,—*profaning the Lord's Day*,—*neglect of coming to the public worship*,—*want of family religion*,—*parents neglect of correcting and instructing their children*;—*masters not taking care of their servants behaviour*;—*wicked and profane companions*, who root out of men's minds the fear of God and of his judgments;—*disorderly houses of entertainment*;—and lastly, an *idle life*, which brings men to poverty.

These things I have just hinted to you, that every one in our several places may do our duty, and endeavour to put a stop to these growing crimes.

That Churchwardens and their assistants may take notice of, and present, (as they are bound by their oaths) *Sabbath-breakers*, *Drunards*, and *Absenters* from the public worship.

That Parents may admonish and correct their children before they fall into the snare of the Devil.

That Servants may abhor every degree of pilfering and wronging their Masters, because they cannot foresee what the least known sin may lead them to.

That Magistrates may not be discouraged, nor their hands weakened, from doing their duty to God and to their country, by the impertinent censures of ignorant men.

And lastly, that we may every one of us remember the command of God, *Thou shalt not hate thy brother; thou shalt not suffer sin upon him*, for that is indeed to hate him.

<sup>t</sup> Numb. xxxii. 28.



"Am I my brother's keeper?" was the answer of the wickedest man then upon earth:—It was the answer of Cain to God.

Yes, truly, every good Christian is so far his Brother and his Neighbour's Keeper, as to do as much as lieth in his power to keep him from ruining himself, either in this world, or in that which is to come.

He is so far his Keeper, as to admonish him when he sees him take evil ways; to correct him if he has any authority over him; and, lastly, to keep him as much as he can from injuring himself or others, by bringing him to judgment; that the nation may not suffer, and draw down the judgments of God for sins that go unpunished.

## S E R M O N LIII.

### O F F R A U D.

GENESIS xliii. 12.

*And take double Money in your hand: And the Money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight."*

**A** Man of Justice and Integrity in his Dealings is a Character very desirable; and most people are apt to claim it as their right. On the other hand, there are so many ways of forfeiting this character, without a man's being exposed to the world for his dishonesty; nay, very often without taking notice of it himself; that one cannot be too earnest with people to consider this matter a little more seriously, if it were but to convince them how often they claim a character which they are not always careful to deserve.

But then, when it is considered, that for every act of injustice a man is accountable to God; and that Restitution, where it can be, must be made, as we hope for salvation, though it is a duty which people are very hardly persuaded to submit to; these things considered, it is every body's concern to know, and to avoid, a sin of so much deceit and danger.

Now; there are several parts of injustice, or ways of forfeiting the character of an honest man, which I shall not now insist upon; such are, The taking what is another man's right, by secret or open force; that is, by theft or robbery; by oppression, when he is not able to contend with us; or by extortion, when his necessities force him to submit to the hardest terms we think fit to impose upon him:—These are all crimes of so ill fame, that all people pretend to abhor them; the laws are severe in punishing them; and such as are guilty are, for the most part, convinced they do ill.

But then there are acts of injustice, which, though they are not so barefaced, yet are as evil in the sight of God, as ill-becoming an

honest man and a Christian, and as hard to be repented of, as the former;—such are, The taking advantage of men's ignorance, or mistakes; over-reaching them in bargains, or in suits at law; imposing upon their belief by a pretended sincerity, and then making a hand of their simplicity: These, and such as these, are the sins that I would endeavour to set in a true light, that all good men may avoid them; and that all evil men may repent of them.

Now; the text I have chosen for this discourse is an instance of great integrity. It is the direction and command of Jacob to his sons; who, returning out of Egypt, where they had been to buy corn, and finding the monies which they had before taken with them packed up and returned with the rest of their goods, were greatly surprised, and at a loss what to think of so uncommon an accident: In the mean time, their Father orders them what to do: "Take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight."

In these words, here are two duties of great importance expressly set down:—Peradventure it was an oversight. Here is a direction never to take advantage of other people's mistakes, negligence, or ignorance.—Take double money in your hand, &c. Here is Restitution expressly required.

Of which two duties, and the sins that are contrary to them, I will endeavour, by the assistance of God's good Spirit, so to speak, as that your time may not be altogether lost in hearing them explained.

\* See Lev. xix. 13. xxv. 14. Prov. xxii. 16.



I. To begin with the first of these duties.

Now; there being a world of practices very dishonest, and yet people make a shift to live in them without either *public reproach*, or *private regret*; it will therefore be proper to consider, how they will be able to justify themselves before the *Judge of all the Earth*.

*Peradventure it was an oversight*; and therefore we must not make our advantage of it. This was Jacob's rule.—Let us see how far this rule ought to oblige *all honest men*, and how well it is observed.

Now, people may not see their interest, but overlook their rights several ways; and to take advantage of their circumstances would be manifest injustice.

For instance:—If a man is in drink, he is, in the very language of the world, *overseen*; and if in such circumstances he happens to fall into ill hands, and makes a bargain, it is ten to one but he heartily repents of what he has done; and very often his family smart for it. Now, a good man, when he sees this, would reason just as Jacob did; *it was an oversight*, and you shall not suffer by it.

But is this the practice of the world? Very far from it. And though the Apostle expressly declares,\* “That the Lord is the avenger of all such as go beyond or defraud another in any matter;” yet people will not easily quit a good bargain, for any law of God, if the laws of man will not force them to it.

To proceed:—How easily may a Poor Man, who has a righteous cause, *mistake* in defending it? But will *his oversight* give me a right to *that*, to which, in truth, I had no just title before I made this advantage of his weakness or poverty? Or can any body think that, because the *injustice* is done in the face of a court, that it is less a crime than if it had been done on the high road?

To feed a man with monies, or to help to run him into debt, by encouraging him to borrow, *when he has no occasion*, that I may get a better bargain of his estate, when he shall be forced to sell it; this should seem by the commonness of it, to be no great crime. But pray does the man know what he is a doing? If he does not, *I take advantage of his weakness*; I help to ruin him, and perhaps his family; and if *he* is really guilty of a sin in squandering away the inheritance of his forefathers, it is impossible *I* should be *guiltless*.

“He that flattereth his neighbour,” saith Solomon,† “spreadeth a net for his feet.” It is possible for a man, by fair speeches, to make his neighbour overlook his own inte-

rest: but then, *to take any ill advantage of a man*, because he has an opinion of *my judgment and integrity*, is a wickedness which God will certainly avenge, though no law on earth can call a man to an account for it.

Because it is less hazardous to wrong orphans than older people, is it therefore less criminal? No, sure: so far from it, that God declares himself concerned in the cause of the fatherless and the widow; that he will undertake and vindicate their cause against those that oppress them. And why? Why, because they have none else to help them. For which *very reason* a man should be very fearful of taking advantage of the *weaknesses*, or *oversights*, of such helpless people, because such people have a right, and a promise, of redress from God. “Re-move not the old land-mark; and enter not into the field of the fatherless: For their Redeemer is mighty; he will plead their cause with thee.”‡

How often do *wills*, and other *writings of moment*, fall into the hands of such as thereby have an opportunity of wronging their neighbour? And people that will make use of such an opportunity do generally think, that this is a less offence than *stealing*. But for what reason? Why, only because for *stealing* (if a man is caught) he will be in danger of being hanged; while at the worst he will only be called a dishonest man, if the other be discovered. And yet the crimes are equally forbidden, equally unjust, and dangerous, in the sight of God; whose judgment will be according to right, and not according to the false opinions of men.

A man who borrows monies, which he knows he cannot repay, plainly takes an advantage of his creditor's ignorance of *his* circumstances. It is probable he may fancy himself less guilty than if he had stolen so much, or taken it by force; but he would not think so, if the laws had made these two crimes equally penal, as they are in truth equally unjust in the sight of God and man.

There are too many who will make no scruple of imposing upon their neighbours' ignorance in passing off bad monies, who yet would startle at the thoughts of counterfeiting the current coin. I question whether such people have considered how near a-kin these two crimes are to one another.

To proceed:—If a man will take all advantages which the very laws allow, he will very often do great injustice, and in good conscience make himself liable to *Restitution*. For instance:—A man, in settling

\* 1 Theff. iv. 6.

† Prov. xxix. 5.

‡ Prov. xxiii. 10, 11.



his estate, which he may righteously do, *forgets some formality which the law requires.* Now, may I honestly go about to break this settlement? No, surely. Why, what then was the law made for? Why, purely to prevent frauds. Then, say you, he may be relieved in Chancery. But shall I give a man the trouble and the expence of law, when I believe before-hand that he has a right in conscience? A man must love the world more than the commands of God that will do so.

The *very same* must be said of *unjust prescriptions*, which yet the laws allow of.—Not that length of time *can* give any man a right which he knows he had not from the beginning, but because there would be no end of *law-suits*, if people were to be disturbed for ever. The law, therefore, does what is best for the public in general, and leaves it to *private men* to act as they will answer to God and a good conscience.

It is too common for people to *conceal*, and to *keep*, what they have found.—People do not sure consider, that there is an *express law of God* against such practices; but they will find very particular *precepts* and *directions* touching this matter, in the 22d chapter of Deuteronomy. But do these precepts oblige us? Yes, sure: unless you suppose that God required of the Jews to be strictly honest, and that Christians may do what they please.

In short; it would be a difficult matter to reckon up the many deceits that may be practised without being liable to be called to an account.

But the *sins of injustice*, which are *most common*, and *least taken notice of*, are such as are committed in the way of *trade* and *bar-gains*. The Wise Man has given us fair warning of this: “As a nail,” saith he, “sticketh fast between the joinings of the stones, so doth sin stick close between buying and selling.”

And therefore a man, who *desires to keep a good conscience*, will be very watchful over himself where he has warning before-hand of the danger he is in; and will be glad to have *such rules* to walk by as he is sure will not deceive him.—Such is that of our Blessed Saviour’s: *Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.* Which, though a very general rule, yet by a well-meaning Christian may be applied to all our dealings with one another.

A man, for instance, who sets this rule before his eyes, will hardly put off damaged or distempered goods for found; will hardly take advantage of the ignorance of the buyer;

will use no deceits to raise the price, or set off the value, of what he desires to sell.

I do not here mention *false weights and measures*; *oppressing the poor*; *buying or selling of stolen goods*; using *oaths* and *lies* to deceive those with whom they deal. Those that do any of these things *know that they do ill*, and all the rules of the Gospel will be of no use to them, so long as they do not believe them.

But for the sake of such as really desire to make a *conscience of their ways*, one would endeavour to make their way *plain* and *safe*, and their consciences easy upon good grounds.

Now; *Gain* being the *end* of trade, and every man having a *right* to a reasonable advantage, of which he himself must *very often* be the *sole judge*, he lieth under a great temptation of being favourable to his own interest, and of overlooking that of others; to prevent which, these considerations should always be present with men of business:—“That he that *hasteth* to be rich can hardly be innocent;”—that every man has a *right* to be dealt with *fairly*;—that all depends upon God’s blessing;—that the fear of wanting what is necessary is the fear of infidels, who know not God;—and *that a man’s life* (and happiness) *consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*.

When a man can consider such truths as these seriously, he is then *disposed* for saving instruction; he will easily hearken to the *rules of religion*, and a *few rules* will serve to direct him to keep a good conscience in the way of business.

I shall recommend one very plain rule, which will go a great way towards directing every conscientious man how to act safely with respect to *gain*; and that is, *to take such a gain, advantage, or consideration, as the person with whom I deal would be satisfied with, if he knew my business as well as I do, and the reasons which oblige me to take such a profit.*

That this is a safe and good rule in trade, is pretty plain from matter of fact; for whenever two persons deal together, who both understand their business well, a few words serve their turn: He that sells asks a reasonable gain, and he that buys sees it is fit he should have what he asks, *all things considered*.

Now, if men would but make this their rule, when they deal with such as are ignorant, it would prevent a great deal of guilt, which, the Wise Man saith, is almost inseparable from buying and selling.

There are certainly secrets in dealing, which every body cannot be acquainted

<sup>a</sup> Eccclus. xxvii. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Matth. vii. 12.

<sup>c</sup> Prov. xxviii. 20.

with;



with; but, to prevent my being partial to myself, I may suppose the person I deal with knew the reasons why I insist upon such a price, and then, if I am conscious to myself that I need not be ashamed of such gain, I have a good testimony of my honesty, and my conscience will never reproach me of injustice.

But if, instead of doing so, I take what I can get, make a hand of the *negligence, ignorance, or simplicity*, of those with whom I have to do, I practise what is *unjust*; I have no regard to the laws of the Gospel; and, if ever I do repent of this sin, I make myself liable to one of the most difficult duties of Christianity, that of *Restitution and Satisfaction*; without which my repentance will never deliver me from the sad consequences of such injustice.

But to prevent, as much as may be, any occasion for the *exercise of the duty of Restitution*, I would lay before you,

*First*; The greatness of these sins.

*Secondly*; The temptations which lead to them, that we may avoid them.

*Thirdly*; Such considerations as are most likely to keep us from running into them.

And first, we are not to judge of the *greatness of crimes*, by the opinion the world has of them. At this rate, we should not only make a jest of taking advantage of, and cheating one another, as is too common; but even the sin of *Adultery*, and some other crimes, which a Christian should not mention without horror, would be accounted *failings*, rather than sins which will shut us out of heaven. But we are to judge of the greatness of crimes, by the *authority* that forbids them; by the *punishment* threatened; and by the *mischiefs* that attend them.

Now, all sins of this kind are plainly against the *great rule of justice*, given by our Saviour: "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." People are very sensible of any such injury done to themselves; and give very ill names to such as *over-reach* them. This shews, that men do not think these *small faults* when they themselves are the sufferers.

And then, it is said expressly of *these sins*, "That the Lord is the avenger of all such;" perhaps because men are too apt to overlook them: And in another place, St. Paul saith, "that the unjust shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven."

Lastly; The mischiefs of these sins are very apparent: They harden the conscience; they provoke and encourage others to sin; and, what is worst of all, it is seldom that people think it necessary to repent of them.

41 Cor. vi. 9.

Christians are for the most part convinced, that *great and crying* sins, such as are liable to infamous punishments in this world, that *these* are to be particularly repented of, or *no pardon is to be expected*; but the sins of fraud are often committed without remorse, and without punishment; are easily *forgotten*, and therefore seldom *truly repented of*; which, in the end, makes them as damnable sins as those that people seem to be more afraid of.

Let us, in the second place, consider *the Temptations to this vice*, and what it is that occasions people to take advantage of their neighbour, with so little regret and fear of punishment.

Is it *ignorance*? That cannot be: There is not the most ignorant person, but knows well enough, when any body wrongs him, that *that man does ill*.

Is it for *want of faith*, and that people do not believe that they are to give an account for their injustice? Few people will own such a degree of infidelity.

Is it for *want*? No, sure; for it is too often, those that have the least need are aptest to wrong and over-reach their neighbours.

Is it an *immoderate love for their children*, and that people will venture at all rather than not leave them all they can? That cannot be the reason, where people have none to provide for; or where they are *undutiful*, and take ill ways.

What then is it which shall tempt men to run such hazards? Why, an *excessive Love for the World*.

People think they have still *too little*; that *more* would make them *more happy*: This makes them forget *the account* they must give, and *those rules* which are prescribed by God for the peace and good government of the world: This makes them overlook their neighbour, as if he had not a *right* to be *fairly dealt with*: This makes them forget that *death* is not far from them, when they shall part with all they have unfairly gotten, and, *if they know their danger*, will wish a thousand times they had *starved* sooner than done the least injustice.

Ye see how much this sin is to be feared, and that it is possible for people by increasing their substance to increase their damnation.

Let me, therefore, recommend to you *a few considerations* to make you abhor so base a vice.

Let us seriously think of it, *That all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*; so that what may be an oversight to man cannot be so to God. Nay, a man



a man may be shut out of heaven for that very thing, which no law on earth could take hold of him for: or, if he repents of it, will cost him dear before he can be forgiven.

Believe it, Christians! the Lord is nigh them that are wronged, to do them justice, when they call upon him in the bitterness of their soul: And it will be no advantage to a man to have doubled his talents, when he has doubled his guilt and his punishment.

Even your posterity shall suffer for your fraud; and you are only laying up a treasure of judgments for those very children which you are so passionately fond of. "God will lay up the iniquities of sinners for their children," saith Job.\* So that it were much better they were left to the wide world, than with any thing that is got by deceit.

Depend upon it, neither your *care in settling* what you will leave, nor your *advice* to your heir, nor *lands*, nor *securities*, nor *bonds*, nor *locks*, can preserve what you shall get by fraud: No, *not Repentance itself*.

That is hard, you will say; will not God pardon me upon *my repentance*? Why, you think, perhaps, that repentance consists in confessing your fault, and asking God's pardon, *without making restitution*: As if a thief, who has got enough to live upon, should ask God's pardon, and then think all is well and forgiven.—Who does not see the wickedness of such an opinion?

To conclude:—If we would follow the good Patriarch's advice, and be innocent, it is necessary that we have *his faith* and *affections*. As how? Why, the Apostle tells us,

\* Chap. xx. 28.

"That he looked for a city whose builder and maker is God;" that is, he did not so much concern himself with what he might get in this short life, but he was for securing, *by all means*, an inheritance in heaven. He kept his *eye* and his *heart* there: And this made him despise all unjust advantages that came in his way, knowing that *this was not the world he was made for*.

And in truth, without this consideration be always present with us, the world has so many temptations to draw us out of the way, that it will be impossible for a man to resist them. *Self-interest*,—*a present advantage*,—*the slight opinion the world has of such crimes*,—will all contribute to draw a man into a snare, who is not steadfastly purposed in his heart, that no worldly advantage shall prevail with him to forfeit his inheritance in heaven: "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

We have not now time to consider particularly, *what is to be done*, where people have by design or unwittingly fallen into this error. The text directs us to *Restitution*, as the only means to preserve the character of honest men, and of Christians: and justice and conscience say the same thing. It is a *difficult*, and it is a *necessary* duty: These two considerations should prevail with people to beware of a sin which requires so *ungrateful* a remedy.

And may the fear and grace of God be with us, to preserve us from injustice of all kinds, and that we may serve him in truth and righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

† Heb. xi. 10.

## S E R M O N LIV.

THE NATURE OF SIN, AND THE PUNISHMENT THAT CERTAINLY FOLLOWS IT.

N U M B. XXXii. 23.

*Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you out.\**

THESE words may be rendered two ways; either as I now read them, *Behold, ye have sinned against the Lord, and be sure your sin will find you out*; or thus, *Behold, ye have sinned, and ye shall be sensible of it when evil overtakes you*; or, *Ye shall know your sin in the punishment thereof*. From which words we may take a just occasion of considering the *nature of sin*, and the *punishment that certainly follows it*.

*Behold, ye have sinned, &c.*—I think it may very truly be said, that most people, when they commit any sin, do hope that they shall never hear of it again. At least, there are few people engaged in sinful courses, who are persuaded that *no sin shall escape without its due reward*.

Now; this is a truth which must of necessity be explained and made out, before ever we can hope to persuade people to keep

\* See Hosea vii. 2. Exod. xx. xxxii. 34. Job xiii. 26.



out of the way of temptations, or to resist temptations when they meet with them against their will.

For if a man be once persuaded, that he cannot possibly escape the judgments of God, but that either in this world, or (which is much worse) in the next, they will certainly overtake him, if he sin presumptuously; that if in his own person, which is not often, he should escape the avenging hand of God, yet that his children, and his children's children unto the third and fourth generation, may feel the smart of his folly and wickedness: If this could be so pressed upon men's minds as to be received and believed, it must certainly, in some measure, put a stop to a great many crying sins which are but too rife amongst us.

Let us therefore consider some of those most remarkable instances of God's displeasure against sin, and the punishments that have always attended it.

To begin with that of our first parents:— And that this in some measure affected the whole creation, and particularly their offspring, we have all reason to be sensible of by the many evils which we are subject to. Their first-born *son* felt it with a witness; and he was more inexcusable, in that he had warning given him by God himself of what would follow, if he should go on to envy his brother as he did. "If thou doest well," that is, if thou repentest of this fault, "shalt thou not be accepted and forgiven? But if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door,"<sup>a</sup> ready to hurry thee to destruction. So that going in, or coming out, thy guilt and punishment will always follow thee. And Cain felt this truth to his sorrow: "My punishment is greater than I can bear." Why; what was this punishment he so sorrowfully complains of? "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day, and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth: and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me."

Here is an exact description and the case of a person *excommunicated for his crimes*; as Cain indeed was by this sentence passed upon him by God himself. Nothing but guilt, and dreadful apprehension of punishment hanging over his head, follows him wherever he goes, when once he is out of God's presence, from under his especial protection, and given over to the power of Satan.

And oh! that people would but consider this, before they yield to the temptations that beset them; that they would think of the *shame*, of the *sorrow*, of the *guilt*, of the *punishment*, that even in *this life* they are sure

<sup>a</sup> Gen. iv. 7.

to meet with, by consenting to known iniquity;—

That those that are *going to do wrong* would consider, how hard it will be to make *restitution*, and yet that *restitution* must be made (where it can be) as we hope for salvation;—

That the *Fornicator* and *Adulterer* would consider, that when he gives way to this wickedness, "he goes as an ox to the slaughter, or as a bird hasteth to the snare," "and knoweth not that it is for his life," and that both soul and body lie at stake;—

That the *Oppressor* would consider, that the "triumphing of the wicked is but short;" (as holy Job expresseth it, chap. xx.) "and though he hath swallowed down riches, yet he shall vomit them up again; that in the fulness of his sufficiency he shall be in straits, and a fire not blown shall consume him:"—

Lastly; That we would all consider, that "there is no peace to the wicked," whatever they may propose to themselves; and that when they least think of it, "destruction shall come upon them; their sin will surely find them out."

But to proceed:—The next remarkable punishment of sin recorded in Scripture was that of the *Flood*, wherein the whole world (eight persons only excepted) were overtaken by their sins, and the vengeance of an offended God.

The cities of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah* were the next dreadful instances of God's displeasure against impenitent sinners; and the fire and brimstone, by which they were destroyed, are a standing, though faint, representation of that punishment which is appointed for impenitent sinners in the world to come.

Very remarkable, in the next place, were the plagues of Egypt, both for their number and circumstances; an example, for all following generations, of the extreme folly of men's hardening their hearts under the judgments of God, instead of being amended by them.

And then, lest men should fancy themselves out of danger, because of the relation they bear to God; because, for instance, they are in covenant with him, or because they have received very great favours at his hands; or, lastly, because they are not so great sinners as others that yet escape;—to convince the world of this mistake, these very people of Israel, for whose sake God had wrought so many wonders in Egypt, these very people became the most remarkable example of God's justice and severity against such as go on to disobey him, notwithstanding



withstanding the warnings he hath given them. Their sin found them out wherever they went, whether in the *wilderness*, or in the land of *Canaan*; and their wickedness followed them at their heels, until they were driven out of that good land, and sent as strangers among all nations, to teach them *what an evil thing and bitter it is to forsake the Lord*.

But before this came to pass, and while they were yet under the more immediate government of God, and under the direction of his Prophets, we have several remarkable instances left us upon record of God's severe judgments upon private men, and families, as well as upon whole nations, for the contempt of his laws.

I shall only mention the calamities which befel the house of David, for his two crying sins, *adultery* and *murder*; and the house of Solomon, for his sins, *intemperance* and *idolatry*. I mention *these*, because they were both great *Princes*, and accountable to none but God for their irregularities; both highly favoured of God before they fell; and both as severely punished afterwards.

The crimes of David were with great art and contrivance concealed from the knowledge of the world; but all this would not do, *his sin found him out*, and brought upon him such a series of disasters as were enough to have driven any other man to despair, and such as would have done so by him, if, upon *his sincere repentance*, he had not been supported by the Spirit of God.—His *sons*: one murdered another; rose in rebellion against himself, drove him from his own palace, debauched his wives.—His *subjects*: many of them abandoned him; the very vilest of his people affronted him to his face; and that very son whom he most doated on, he had the mortification to see slain in the midst of his iniquities and rebellion.

His son Solomon (when once he forsook the commandment of God) fared no better; he *multiplied strange wives*; these soon introduced *idolatry*; and this abominable sin was the occasion of infinite misfortunes, which befel his family and kingdom for many generations.

Now; all these things were written for our example, and admonition, That we may see what we are to expect; what *have* been, and what are *like to be*, the fruits of sin: That if neither *private men*, nor *princes*; if neither *single cities*, nor *whole nations*, have escaped; if the third and fourth generations have felt the smart of their ancestors' folly and wickedness, it will be the maddest presumption in the world, for any man to think that *his sin only shall not find him out*.

The truth is, we are generally so far from being ignorant of *this*, that there is nothing more usual than for people, and those of the meanest capacities, to make *this observation*,—That God, even in this world, does one time or other overtake sinners. The only mistake and misfortune we labour under is *this*,—That while we do easily see the sins of other people in their punishment, we are not willing to believe that this will be our own case.

Now, this is a very fatal delusion, to acknowledge the *justice of God*, and *his providence*, in other men's punishments, and at the same time not to be awakened ourselves, and warned not to offend the righteous Judge of all the earth.

This, therefore, will oblige us to consider, what it is that so bewitches men to do those things which they have reason to believe they must dearly pay for one time or other.

Now; every man, who *knowingly* breaks the laws of God, must of necessity lie under some of these following *errors* or *delusions*:

*First*; That a man may avoid the punishment due to his sins, either by committing them in *secret*,—or by his *power*, or *wisdom*, if they should happen to be known.

Or, *secondly*; he may hope to repent, before the judgments of God shall overtake him.

Or, *thirdly*; a man may fancy that it is not possible for him to avoid either the sin or the punishment that attends it.

Or, *fourthly*; because some have escaped the judgments of God in this world, though their sins have been sufficiently provoking, there are many who hope that they may do so also.

*Lastly*; There are but too many, who never think of a judgment to come, and if they can but escape in this life, they are not at all concerned for any after-reckoning.

These are, I think, the most *common delusions* by which men are led *knowingly* to sin against God, though they are *plainly told*, and generally find by sad experience, *that their sin will find them out*.

It will be necessary to bestow a few reflections upon each of these *most fatal delusions*.

And first; it is no new thing for people to hope to *hide* their sins, and by that means to escape the punishment that is due to them. "Hast thou seen" (saith God to Ezekiel, ch. viii. 12.) "what these people do in the dark? For they say, the Lord seeth us not." And Job tells us,<sup>a</sup> that the adulterer "waiteth for the twilight, saying, No eye shall see me."

<sup>a</sup> Chap. xxiv. 15.

But



But alas! all this caution will not do, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." And both good and bad men have always found this true: "Thou didst this thing secretly," saith the Lord to David,<sup>1</sup> "but I will punish thee before all Israel, and before the sun:" that is, that they may see thy crimes in the judgments executed upon thee.

It will be sufficient to discover the folly of this delusion, by only repeating the words of the son of Syrach:<sup>k</sup> "A man that breaketh wedlock," or doeth any other wickedness, "saying thus in this heart, Who seeth me? What need I to fear? Such a man only feareth the eyes of men, and knoweth not that the eyes of the Lord are ten thousand times brighter than the sun. This man shall be punished in the streets of the city; and where he suspecteth not, he shall be taken; that men may know that there is nothing better than the fear of the Lord."

After all, there is some *modesty*, though not much *wisdom*, in endeavouring to hide one's sins. But then there are people who are not concerned to be at this trouble, who are neither *ashamed* of their faults, nor *afraid* of the punishment they deserve. But what do they get by this? Why; they escape the censures of men, which are designed to reclaim them; and they fall into the hands of the living God, than which, the Scriptures say, nothing can be more dreadful.

And indeed we have instances enough, and some of them of the *greatest men on earth*, who were made sensible of this truth,—*That God is able to controul those who despise all other power.*

David and Nebuchadnezzar are two of those Princes who felt this to their sorrow; and Joab, and his brother, were two of those subjects who were too great for the laws, and too hard for their Prince's power to deal with them. But God met with them in a way worthy of their crimes.

And to instance but in one more:—Pray, who called Judas to an account for *betraying the innocent blood*? The government approved of what he had done, and paid him for it; and he might have lived longer to have enjoyed his reward, if *his sin had not found him out*, and driven him to destruction.

All considering people will learn from what has been said, what a foolish and dangerous thing it is to hope to escape by *concealing* their crimes,—by *standing* in them,—or by *encouraging* other people in their wickedness, as if no harm would follow.

I shall conclude this particular with the words of the Wise Man:<sup>l</sup> "Mercy may

"pardon the meanest," or the humble; "but mighty men," such as fear nothing, "shall be mightily tormented. For he who is Lord over all standeth in awe of no man's person;" and very often causeth, (as the same Wise Man expresseth it,<sup>m</sup>) "That they who promised to drive away terrors and troubles from others, became sick themselves of fear."

But, secondly; *There are many who know they do ill, but hope to repent, and be forgiven, before the judgments of God overtake them.*

Those who thus delude themselves, and speak thus of repentance, know very little what *repentance* is, and hardly imagine what a bitter cup they are preparing for themselves, if ever they should repent, *which is very uncertain.*

Fear of punishment hanging over our heads may help us to counterfeit repentance, but does not always produce *true repentance*. Pharaoh himself, when he feared his destruction to be at hand, cries out, "I have sinned; the Lord is righteous, and I and my people are wicked."<sup>n</sup> But, after all, here was no true repentance.

It will be sufficient to shew the extreme folly of depending upon such repentance, while we continue in sin, by asking a few short questions.

Can you, do you suppose, repent when you please?

Do not you take the ready way to provoke God to harden your heart, so that it will be impossible for you ever to repent?

Will your repentance, are you sure, hinder the judgments of God from falling upon you?

May not God, *supposing you shall repent*, forgive you in the next world, and yet make you dearly pay for your presumption in this?

In short; whoever sins wilfully, in hopes that by repentance hereafter all shall be well with him, doth in effect resolve as follows:—That some time or other he will be heartily sorry for what he is going to do;—that he will wish he had never done it;—that he will be ashamed and weep bitterly;—that he will loath and abhor himself;—that he will be afflicted, and mourn, and weep, for the evil that he is going to commit, &c.

But this is but one part of repentance: he must, moreover, (as the Apostle bids the faithful penitent,<sup>o</sup>) "Go boldly to the throne of grace, that he may obtain mercy."

Now, if any man can hope, that he *can with confidence hereafter go to the throne of grace*, without a resolution of forsaking his

<sup>1</sup> 2 Sam. xii. 12. <sup>k</sup> Eccles. xxiii. 18, &c. <sup>l</sup> Wisd. vi. 6.

<sup>m</sup> Wisd. xvii. 8. <sup>n</sup> Exod. ix. 28. <sup>o</sup> Heb. iv. 16.



fin at present, and quitting all occasions of them, he must hope without reason and without promise.

That repentance is a thing highly acceptable to God;—that God of his great mercy will accept of our repentance instead of a perfect obedience;—that God is *long-suffering*,—giveth time and space for repentance,—doth not hastily execute his judgments,—is not willing that *any should perish*;—these are all undoubted truths. But that he will be merciful where men are obstinate;—that we should offend him at present in hopes of appeasing him hereafter: God forbid that such thoughts should come into a Christian's heart; God forbid that any Christian should suffer such thoughts to lodge there!

But, thirdly; there is another delusion, which is not less common, or less dangerous: *When people fancy that it is not possible for them to avoid either the sin, or the punishment that attends it.*

This has been an old and a wicked complaint against God. The son of Syrach<sup>p</sup> justly reproves all that speak after this manner: "Say not thou, he hath caused me to err, for he hath no need of the sinful man." And yet wicked men are very apt to say this, and to excuse themselves; *This was my lot, and I could not avoid it.*

Now, thus far they are in the right; namely, God has ordained,—That every sin shall have its due reward;—that the wicked shall be taken in their own traps;—that the drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty;—that drownsiness shall clothe a man with rags;—that riches got by vanity shall be diminished;—*that he will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate him.*

But to say, that God has ordained men to sin, when he hath expressly declared, *That he desireth not the death of a sinner;—that he would have all men to be saved;—that it is purely because men will not retain God in their knowledge, that God gives them over to a reprobate mind, to work all wickedness with greediness.* After this, to excuse themselves, by pretending a necessity of sinning, will by no means lessen their sin or their punishment.

The next delusion we took notice of was this;—*That because some have escaped the judgments of God in this world, others are hereby encouraged not to fear them.*

But if people would but consider, they would see, that since sin must be punished either in this life, or in the life to come, a sinner has no reason to rejoice, or to harden himself in wickedness, because God does not call him to an account here.

<sup>p</sup> Ecclus. xv. 12.

St. Paul reasons after another manner:—*"When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world,"* namely, to eternal punishments. So that whenever a man is sensible that he has offended God, if he would be thought a child of God, he ought to expect, and be thankful for, his fatherly chastisement.

Directly contrary to this is the way of wicked men: if they are chastened, they repine; if no evil befalls them, they are hardened. Unhappy men! whom neither *prosperity can invite*, nor *adversity force*, to fear God.

*The last delusion is that of those who are resolved not to think of a judgment to come; and who, if they can but escape in this world, are not concerned for an after-reckoning.* But will this secure us? Are we sure we shall not be accountable, because we have not thought of such an account? It is impossible to describe the folly of such a way of reasoning.

Pray let us make the experiment in matters of less moment; let us try, for instance, whether by such an indifference as this is, we can keep ourselves from poverty or from death? Whether a spendthrift is farther off ruin, because he does not think of it? Let us also consider what St. Paul saith to this purpose:—"If we believe not, yet God *"abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself;"* that is, what God has appointed *will* come to pass, though all the world should resolve not to believe it.

This was exactly the case of the old world. They were forewarned of the approaching flood, but not one would lay this to heart; and what was the consequence, but that they all perished in their iniquity?

So that you see what will be the consequence of sin, though *we* should altogether hold our peace, though *you* should altogether refuse to hear us.

*If you have sinned against the Lord, your sin will surely find you out;—that the world may be convinced, that God governs it in truth and justice, and that he sees all things that are done under the sun;—that good men may be reclaimed by his fatherly corrections;—that wicked men may be left without excuse;—and that all may be awakened into a due care of their ways, that they may avoid what will otherwise certainly come upon them.*

I will conclude the whole with these short observations:—

*First;* That since God has, in all ages, and upon all sorts of people, given so many

<sup>q</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 32.

<sup>r</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 13.

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instances of his severe displeasure against sin, it is the greatest folly and presumption to *sin*, depending upon the goodness of God, or in hopes that our being called by *his* name will excuse us from punishment.

*Secondly*; That we ought not to repine, if, when our sin has found us out, we receive the just reward of our iniquities; but, with an humble submission to God's will, be well pleased that our punishment is not reserved to the next world.

*Thirdly*; That since all afflictions are designed in mercy to better us, the best use we can make of them is, to search our ways, see whom we have offended, and, by a sincere repentance, endeavour to appease the anger of God; or, in our Saviour's words and advice, "to sin no more, lest a worse evil cometh."

*Fourthly*, and above all things, let us consider, That however well we may *escape*, or *bear* afflictions *here*, yet, if we do not sincerely repent us of our sins, our sins will *one day* find us out, and overtake us, when God shall judge the world in righteousness, and give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings, whether they have been good or bad.

Now, may God, of his infinite mercy, turn from us all those evils that we most righteously have deserved. May we ever acknowledge the *hand*, and the *justice* of God, in whatever his providence bringeth upon us; and whatever befalls us in this world, may we, by a timely repentance, prevent and escape the wrath to come, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To whom, with the Father, &c.

## S E R M O N    L V .

### FORNICATION FORBIDDEN BOTH IN THE LAW AND IN THE GOSPEL.

E P H E S .   V .   3 , 4 , 5 .

*But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named amongst you, as becometh Saints: [that is, Christians:] neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God.\**

**T**HE things, good Christians, I am going to warn you against, are the sins of *Fornication*, and other *impurities*, forbidden both in the *Law* and in the *Gospel*; concerning which the Apostle saith, "That no *whoremonger*, nor *unclean person*, hath" nor can have "any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ, and of God."

But that is not all; for St. John adds, "That such shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."

These are *frightful words*; and I repeat them, that you may be prepared to hear what I am going to say upon this subject, with the greatest seriousness.

Now; there are *three sorts of people*, to whom I am going to speak.

*First*; To such as have not defiled themselves with these vile sins.

*Secondly*; To such as know themselves guilty, but have never laid it seriously to

heart, what danger they are in, and what will be their portion, if they go on in their wickedness.

*Lastly*; To such as are sensible of their error, and sincerely desire to be restored to God's favour, which, by such foul vices, they have forfeited:—To such I would give proper directions for their recovery.

I. My first instruction shall be *to such as have not defiled themselves by these crimes*.—And when I have plainly laid before you, first, how *happy* they are who keep themselves undefiled and innocent from such foul vices;—secondly, what an *evil thing* and *bitter* it will be to fall into such courses;—thirdly, the great *danger* people are in of falling into this sin;—and lastly, the *means* which God has afforded us of *avoiding* both the sin and the danger:—When this is done, those that hear with attention will be convinced, I hope, that they *have reason*, that they *may* and *ought* to preserve their innocence as they value their souls.

\* See Deut. xxii. 22. xxiii. 17. 2 Sam. xiii. 13. Prov. ix. 18. xxii. 14. Hosea iv. 11. Matth. v. 28. 1 Cor. vii. 2. ix. 27. 1 Pet. ii. 11. 1 John iii. 3. Rev. xxi. 8.



And first; It is a great misfortune that very often we do not *see* our happiness till we *feel* the want of it.

We see people, for example, exceedingly ashamed when their wickedness comes to light; *blaming* their folly, *lamenting* their condition, their *friends* reproaching, and the *laws* correcting them. This should make us to abhor such vices;—to be very thankful to God, who has hitherto kept us from falling;—and to see the *wisdom* and the *happiness* of those that *fear* God, and *keep his commandments*.

And then, they that value a good name above all things, and labour to be esteemed, they know very well that sobriety and modesty are necessary to gain the good opinion of all wise people.

On the other hand, *the attire of an harlot*, the *wit* of an impudent woman, the *beauty* of one that is dishonest, please those only who are void of all worth and goodness.—But *these* are worldly considerations only: They may serve to restrain, but can hardly make us virtuous.

The *true happiness* of such as keep themselves *pure* consists in *doing the will of God*, whose will is, “that we abstain from fornication;”—in knowing that the good Spirit of God will not forsake them, while they are free from pollutions;—in a constant experience of the power of God, delivering them from evil;—and lastly, in the testimony of a good conscience, that they use their best endeavours *to mortify their corrupt affections*, as well as to preserve their reputation with the world.

Secondly; But the *happiness* of those that lead a *chaste life* will better be seen when compared with *the wretched condition of such as, being possessed with an unclean spirit, do commit all iniquity with greediness*.

The Apostle saith, “That fornication, and uncleanness, are sins which should not be named,” should not, if possible, be known “amongst Christians;” for they are sins which defile the soul, as well as the body;—they *ruin the understanding*;—they *fear the conscience*;—they *destroy all good purposes*;—they are the *occasion* of infinite other sins. For instance:—

How many infants have been murdered? How many women have in effect murdered themselves, by taking medicines to hide their shame? How many have been perjured? How many have broke their *own*, and how many have broke their *parents’* hearts?

And do not think to say within yourselves, *I should hardly do what others have done*;—I

<sup>a</sup> 1 Theff. iv. 4.

would never *forswear* myself;—I would never consent to *murder a child*;—for, believe it for a *certain truth*, if you once become the *Devil’s servant*, you must then *do what he* will have you to do, as others *have done* before you, *let what will follow*.

Then pray consider, that if once you get *evil habits*, and especially of *these sins*, you will find it exceeding hard to leave them. And yet you *must* leave them, or you must never think of going to heaven.

Nay, suppose you do resolve, and do in good earnest repent of your sin, yet there is still a very melancholy consideration behind; you can but repent for *one*, you can but repent for *yourself*; and whether those that have been partners with you in iniquity, whether *those* will ever repent, you *know not*. Neither can you be sure that your own repentance will be accepted, or whether the blood of those that perish will not be required at your hands.

After all, it is much to be feared, that *these sins are too seldom truly repented of*. They are *very common*, and people make *light of them*; they are very hardly brought to confess them in public; and when they do so, they are often more affected with the *shame* than with the *sin* that caused it; so that they have great reason to doubt of the sincerity of their own repentance.

Add to all this, the terrors of a guilty conscience, the fearful expectation of the vengeance of God,—and no more, sure, needs to be said, to shew the evil of *this sin*:—And these considerations should give Christians such an abhorrence of all impurity, as to make them tremble for very fear of falling into any of these crimes.

Thirdly; *For we are, in truth, in greater danger than is generally thought of*.

It cannot be denied, but that people live in the world, as if there were no danger, as if they were secure against all temptations: And this is the reason why so many miscarry.

Christians do not consider, that as long as they live in this world, they carry a corrupt heart, and a corrupt nature, about them;—that the Devil will take all opportunities to lead them into sin;—that we are beset with temptations, turn us where we will;—that people have been ruined when they have least thought of it;—that therefore we have need of an *especial grace*, and of all *possible care*, to keep us from falling into this vice; especially if we consider, that there is scarce *any age*, or *any condition of life*, free from danger.

How many have fallen into these crimes even before they could well be suspected! And too many have continued in them when

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age, and even the sight of death, should have cured them of their lusts.

How many, who have had a sober education, have afterwards fallen into lewd courses; and very many after the most solemn vows to the contrary.

In short; there are so many instances of these sins, known to all the world; and so many more (it is to be much feared) done in secret, and known only to God, and to those that are guilty, that every Christian, who has any fear for himself, will seriously consider *the danger he is in*, and will think, *by what means he, and all that belong to him, may avoid both the sin and the danger.*

Fourthly; *What those means and motives are*, we come now to consider. And let me, in the first place tell you, for a truth, *that nothing but the fear of God can hinder you from falling into these destructive vices.*

Some will tell you, that *shame* will restrain you;—that the *fear of punishment* ought to make you afraid;—that if you fall into evil courses, you will disoblige your friends, and it will be worse for you;—that you will spend what you have, and be despised by every body. But after all, I am afraid these arguments will not do: for these vices are too common. People are not ashamed of them, as they ought to be; and when the Devil has filled their hearts with lust, they will care for neither *friends, estate, nor reputation.*

What then, must people be left to themselves? No, by no means. We should rather set before them *what will make them to tremble*:—"Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge,"<sup>\*</sup> however they escape the censures of man: "They shall have no inheritance in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>†</sup> "They shall have their portion in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone."<sup>‡</sup> Will not this consideration make people afraid of a sin which will ruin them for ever? Either say, you do not believe this, or resolve to live as if you *did* believe it.—Say, with Joseph, when you are tempted, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"<sup>§</sup> *whose eyes are in every place, beholding the evil and the good.*

After all, it must be owned, that there are people who know, and pretend to believe all this, who yet transgress these laws. But then, they are such as *do not fear God*. For such as are afraid of offending God will strive to mortify their corrupt affections; will avoid, as much as may be, all occasions and temptations to a sin, which does so easily beset us; and will most sincerely beg God's grace and protection.

It is impossible for any man to live as becomes a Christian, who will not use *these means to preserve his innocence.*

For, first, *Intemperance and Chastity* are utterly inconsistent. He that will study to please the flesh, will not care to please God. And remember, that he who cannot deny his appetites in meat and drink, will not be able to deny himself when his desires shall lead him to forbidden wickedness.

St. Paul himself thought it a duty *to keep under his body*: and shall we think it needless? Rather let us be at some pains to *subdue* our corrupt nature,—to *deny* its cravings,—to lay some wholesome restraints upon our inclinations, especially, since it is for avoiding those sins which lead *directly to hell.*

*Fullness of bread, and abundance of idleness*, was that which brought destruction upon Sodom; and it is what will corrupt the *best heart*. It was for this reason the Wise Man set down this *worthy caution*: "If thou givest thy soul the desires that please her, she will make thee a laughing-stock to thine enemies that malign thee;" and especially, to our *ghostly enemies*, who will desire no better occasion to ruin us.

In the second place; *Temptations*, and *occasions of sin*, are carefully to be avoided. IDLE COMPANY has ruined so many, that it would be needless to warn you against it, but that we see people as *fearless* in ill company, as if they had the power, in their own hands, of *resisting temptations*; so that, not knowing their *own weakness*, and *fearing no danger*, they often fall into a snare before they think of it. And a *lewd behaviour*, an immodest story, a filthy song, have very often betrayed unwary people into *such miscarriages* as (before) they *abhorred*, and which they have bitterly repented of all the days of their lives.

Whoever therefore purposes to preserve their innocence, must set a watch upon their eyes, their ears, and especially upon their hearts; otherwise it is to no purpose to *resolve*, or to *pretend* to be virtuous.

Will a man or woman, for example, who will run into any company, hear any sort of language without blushing, see indecent actions without leaving the place; will such people say they are chaste? They have no reason to say so; or if they *do*, they have no reason to be believed.

And though we cannot live in the world without meeting with temptations, yet we may avoid them much oftener than we do; and if we have the fear of God in our hearts, we shall not be hurt by them. Let but women so behave themselves, as that

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. xiii. 4. <sup>†</sup> 1 Cor. vi. 9. <sup>‡</sup> Gen. xxxix. 9.

<sup>§</sup> Eccles. xviii. 31.



may believe them to be chaste; and they may be confident nobody will attempt them *but in an honest way.*

But *this* is the real occasion of so many miscarriages:—People discover, either by their very *vain dress*, or *looks*, or *words*, or *behaviour*, they discover, *that they do not fear God*,—that they only *want to be tempted*;—and this encourages those that are as naught as themselves to *tempt*, and to *gain their wicked ends* of them. Let us therefore remember, that when we say, *lead us not into temptation*, we are bound not to run into temptations willingly; or if we do, we must not expect that God will deliver us from evils of our own seeking.

What has been now said shews us the necessity of another *means* of preserving our innocence, and that is, *fervent Prayer*; since it is impossible, in the midst of so many temptations, for any Christian to be long innocent, unless *supported by divine grace.*

The very slightest temptation will ruin us, if left to ourselves: Therefore has God encouraged us to *pray* to him for help, and has promised to hear us. But then, it is not any sort of prayer that will prevail with him, to *prevent*, or to *deliver* us from evil. We must know our *own misery*, to *humble* us; we must know our *danger*, to make us be in good earnest; and our *weakness* and *backslidings*, that we may be more careful of our ways. Such dispositions as *these* will recommend us to God's favour and protection.

And the true reason why so many people become an easy prey to the Devil, is this:—They seldom pray in private; they pray in publick without any sense of their wants, without any *concern* to be heard, without *devotion*, and without *reverence*. How then should they expect to be heard, and delivered from danger?

If Christians did but know to what miseries *those* are abandoned who are possessed with an unclean spirit, they would pray to be delivered from such a *curse* with more *concern* than a man that asks to be delivered from *perpetual slavery.*

But there is another *means* which God has appointed, that men may have no pretence for running into vices which must certainly ruin them soul and body; and this is, a *chaste Marriage*.—"Marriage is honourable in all," saith the Apostle, "and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge."

Believe it, Christians, the lawful provision which God has made for those that *cannot contain*; the more *easy* the remedy is, the more *severe* will be *their* punishment, and the more difficult *their* pardon, who refuse to make use of it, and rather chuse *their own*

*abominable ways*, to satisfy their brutish lusts. As for such as have chosen *this remedy*, they have all the obligations to be content with such a merciful provision, that God or man can lay upon them. It is God's ordinance; they have solemnly vowed to observe it; it is plainly their interest to do so, as they value either a *quiet life*, or a *peaceable conscience*; but above all, *as they hope for salvation.*

If we believe the Sacred Scriptures, they tell us expressly, that *this sin leads directly to hell*; and *everlasting destruction* is not to be *jested with*. One would hope that no more need to be said upon that head.

But now we are speaking of the *means* of preserving people from falling into these foul vices, we must not forget the *Duty of Parents*, and the great care they ought to take, to prevent their children from falling into these deadly crimes.

And first, it is very observable, that if a woman of Israel committed folly, by playing the whore in her father's house, she was to be stoned to death; and with this most *afflicting circumstance*; she was to be brought to the "door of her father's house, and the men of her city were to stone her with stones till she died." A sad spectacle, God knows, and a punishment very often as great upon the father as upon the child!

And what was this for? Why, to oblige parents to take all possible care of their children's education and manners; to keep them from *evil company*; to teach them the *fear of the Lord*; to correct them when they say or do any thing contrary to chastity; to pray for them; to set them a sober example; to marry them in due time; and not to expose them to the snare of the Devil, out of cursed covetousness, or for some base ends.

And though *this law* does not take place here, yet parents should consider, that by neglecting *these duties*, they expose their children, and themselves too, to very great evils, of which *shame* and *punishments* in this world are the least.

One cannot wonder to see parents in great trouble for the loss of their children; but then should not this natural affection lead them to endeavour that their children may be happy when they die? And yet *that* is impossible, if you breed them up *without the fear of God*. All the hope you can have is, that some time or other they may repent.

But little do you know what goes to true repentance, and especially for *sins of uncleanness*; they are so bewitching, when once people have fallen into evil courses, that it is very hard to forsake them. Besides, it is not every one who changes his course of life,

<sup>a</sup> Prov. vii. 27.

<sup>b</sup> Deut. xxii. 21.



that truly repents him of his faults. If the heart is not changed, there is no conversion. So that it is much to be feared, that very many, whom we hope well of, do never truly repent, must never go to heaven.—And how far parents are answerable for this, their own consciences will tell them.

And indeed it is no wonder that *these sins* are so *very common*. It is plain, young people do not know their duty, nor the *dangers* they are exposed to. We must use the very *rigour* of the law to *force* them to come to be instructed. As for *shame*, how should *that* restrain them, when even many of the gravest of our people make no more than a jest of these sins when they come to be openly censured? They speak of them before their children and servants, as if there were no more in them *than doing penance*.

And when the church, by *this discipline*, as the last remedy, hopes to recover them to a sense of their errors, what pains will they take to avoid their censures, or to have them mitigated?

Add to all this, how very many families are there, in which there is not the least *sign* of religion; where they never pray to God for his blessing; where they never give him thanks for his mercies; where they never beg his grace for themselves or for their children? Will any body expect that such people should resist temptations?

If one must speak the plain truth, the *Devil* is the *Master* of such families, and they *must* do what he would have them to do; they must be *thieves*, or *whoremongers*, or *sabbath-breakers*, or *murderers*, or any thing which will make them truly *his servants*, and bring them to him when they die.

I now come to consider the two cases, which I proposed at the beginning; that is to say, *The case of such as have fallen into these sins, and are not sensible of the sad condition they are in; and the case of those that, being convinced of their danger, desire to be restored to God's favour.*

In speaking to *these particular cases*, I shall now only add what I think may be proper to *awaken you* to a *due care* of yourselves.

And first; know for certain, that it will be your *own fault* purely, if ever you shall be so unhappy as to fall into any of these vices. For, when God commands us to be *chaste*, and to avoid *fornication* and all *unclean-ness*, he will enable us to do so, if we are not wanting on our part.

God knows all our weaknesses; he knows what temptations we are like to meet with; he knows what we can do ourselves, and what we ought to do, towards preserving

our innocence; he knows that we shall want his grace; he has therefore bid us ask sincerely, and we shall have all the assistance that is needful for us. But then he commands us—to be careful of ourselves; to live soberly; to keep out of the way of temptations as much as may be; and especially to avoid idleness and evil company; and then he will hear our prayers, and deliver us from the evil which we fear, and which we pray to be delivered from. And as you hope to keep yourselves pure from these foul crimes, keep a strict watch over your hearts.

It is the heart which is the fountain of all evil, as our Saviour has told us; and lewd thoughts and desires will produce lewd actions, if not resisted and cast out. “Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.”

If people make a mock of these sins, think you thus with yourself:—These people do not consider, that fornicators and adulterers cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. If they did, it would certainly turn their laughter into sorrow and mourning.

If, to avoid fornication, you purpose to marry, remember, that “a prudent wife is from the Lord.”<sup>a</sup> And if so, you must pray to God to direct you, or never expect an happy choice.

This is certainly the cause of so many miserable matches: People go together without thoughts of God, and God leaves them to their own wilful choices. And what can one expect to follow, but hatred, strife, separation, and, too often, adultery?

To conclude:—Let this be seriously thought of; that all sins, and especially the sins of *fornication* and *adultery*, and such *foul crimes*, will meet with a due reward, one time or other. *If you sin against the Lord, your sin will surely find you out.* There is no hiding your crimes from God; no blotting them out of his remembrance; no escaping his severe justice; he can bring evils upon you, when you least expect them; come upon you like an armed man, not to be resisted; deprive you of the dearest blessings of your life, and make you “to possess the iniquities of your youth.”

Be persuaded, therefore, good Christians, to prevent your own misery; avoid temptations; mortify your corrupt affections, pray earnestly for grace, and grieve not the Holy Spirit by which you are sanctified; and you will escape all these evils, and, what is worse than all these, eternal death.

And do Thou, O God, rebuke the spirit of impurity that is gone out amongst us;

<sup>a</sup> Prov. iv. 23. <sup>d</sup> Prov. xix. 14. <sup>e</sup> Job xxxii. 34.



preserve all those that are yet undefiled from all filthiness of flesh and spirit; make us all watchful over ourselves, and of those sins that do most easily beset us; that keeping ourselves pure, as thy servants ought to be,

we may, when we come to die, be admitted into the Paradise of God, where no impure thing can enter.

Grant this, O Heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen, Amen.*

## S E R M O N LVI.

### THE CAUSES AND THE REMEDIES OF MEN'S NEGLECTING THE CARE OF THEIR SALVATION.

O Lord and Master, suffer me not to forget my duty, both to save myself and them that hear me. Bless, I beseech Thee, this Instruction, that both I and my Flock may be thoroughly awakened by it; that we may so pass the remainder of our days to thy honour, as to be always in that state in which we desire to be found at thy coming; that we may not think of death with fear, but with the hopes of good servants, who humbly expect to be rewarded by Thee, O Jesus. *Amen.*

LUKE xiii. 8, 9.

*Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.\**

I Will read you the whole parable, that you may better understand the words I have made choice of for your present instruction.

"A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."

I take it for granted, that not one who hears (and understands) me, but knows the meaning and intent of this parable. And can I read, or can you hear, these words, without having some such thoughts as these in your hearts?—"I have, by the favour of God, had some time of trial, in order to mend my corrupt nature, and to recommend myself to his favour, by good works, and fruits worthy of a place in the life he has given me;—it very much concerns me, therefore, to consider what use I have made of my past time, and how I purpose to spend the remainder of my days; lest it should be determined in the decrees of God, *That this is to be the last year I am to live.*"

We see plainly, by this parable, that we are not sent into the world for nothing, no more than trees, which are designed for fruit, are suffered to grow, unless they are likely to bear fruit. And the most careless observer cannot but take notice of the great patience of God, who bears with his fruitless creatures, one year after another, while there is any hope that they will answer the end of their being sent into the world.—And whoever is meant by *this dresser of the vineyard*, one cannot but admire his great charity, who can have so much compassion for those who have so little concern for themselves.

In the next place, you cannot but observe, that there is a determinate time, when God, the Lord of the vineyard, will bear no longer with his unfruitful creatures, after all the necessary methods and pains have been made use of to mend their nature, and to make them bear fruit answerable to amendment of life.

Lastly; the most thoughtless Christian cannot but take notice of the punishment of God's abused patience: "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

Would to God you would now join with me in making the best use of this very instructive parable; that we may not let one year after another pass over our heads without considering, that a few years *will certainly*, and even a few days *may*, put an end

\* See Matth. xxi. 12. Luke xii. 36.



to our time of trial, and that then "the night cometh, when no man can work."

Now, *a work* every soul of us have upon our hands,—a work that must be done before we die, or it had been better for us that we had never been born. And yet, when one looks into the world, one would be tempted to conclude, that few Christians *know*, and fewer *consider* this, or that they have any thing to do, but every one to follow their own natural inclinations; not remembering the sentence of God upon all mankind,—“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread all the days of thy life;”—a sentence designed, *in great mercy*, to make this world uneasy to us, that we may set our hearts upon a world where true ease and peace are to be found:—*So great are the mischiefs, so great the sin, of an idle, useless life!*

Indeed there is a diligence as *evil*, and even *worse* than doing nothing: There are people who even take pains to ruin themselves and others;—there are too many whose whole lives are spent in laborious pleasures;—and the most of all do labour hard for that which will not profit them in the end.

None of these, we may be sure, do answer the end of their creation, which is, *to glorify God, and to fit ourselves for that happiness for which we were made.*

This is what concerns us all to know and to think of, as ever we hope to be happy. This is *the fruit* expected from us; and for which only our lives are continued to us. And lastly, this is what the Apostle exhorts Christians earnestly to think of, “and to work out their salvation with fear and trembling;” that is, with a concern suitable to the work they have to do. Of which work take this short account:—

We have, every soul of us, dishonoured God by our sins; and therefore have offended him, and must make our peace with him, by a sincere repentance, and this forthwith, lest we should provoke him to cut us off before we have done it.

We have, the very best of us, contracted too great a love for this world, and it will be expected, and will require time and pains to wean our hearts from it, and to gain such tempers as are absolutely necessary to fit us for heaven.

We have, too many of us, contracted evil habits, and these we must get rid of, and that as soon as possible, lest we carry them with us into another world, for then we are ruined.

We stand in need of the grace of God every day of our lives; and if we do not every day of our lives pray for it, we have no reason to expect it.

We receive favours from God continually; and as we hope for the continuance of his blessings, we are obliged to give him thanks as often as we receive them.

We are obliged to honour God by doing our duty in that state of life in which his providence has placed us.

Whether we are parents or children; or masters, or servants; or magistrates, or pastors; or poor, or rich; all have their several duties, by discharging of which, as we ought to do, we honour God, and answer the end of our creation, and are fitting ourselves for a better life.

And we are not to forget that we shall meet with difficulties in the doing these several duties.

We have enemies to watch against:—The Devil, a very powerful spirit, seeking whom he may devour, finding them off their guard, or from under the protection of God;—the world, a very corrupt world, tempting us to follow its ways, which lead to certain destruction;—and lastly, our own corrupt hearts, powerfully inclining us to evil. So that we need not be at pains to be undone: we shall be undone of course if we do not, through the great grace of God, strive to overcome these difficulties.

In short, that Christian who fancies that he has little or nothing to do, in order to be saved, and is at a loss how to spend his time, does not yet know what it is to be a Christian, and is in some danger of being treated as a fruitless tree: *Cut it down, &c.*

And were it not for the infinite goodness and patience of God, who waits for our amendment, this sentence would have been executed upon many who yet live, and have time given them to save themselves from ruin.

God (his Spirit assures us) “is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;” for he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth. He has declared, “that he has no pleasure in the death of sinners.” And he so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, “that whosoever believeth in him,” and so believeth as to obey his laws, “shall not perish, but have everlasting life.”

What are all these most gracious declarations for, but to encourage sinners to lay hold of his mercy, while they have time given them to do it in? And they certainly abuse his goodness and patience, when they delay one moment to repent, and to lead holy lives.

And take notice, I beseech you, of what the Holy Spirit declares will be the punishment



ment of those who despise the riches of his goodness and patience, and long-suffering, not considering that the goodness of God is intended to lead sinners to repentance,—“They treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath;” than which there is nothing more severe nor more certain, however little sinners think of it.

And for God's sake, let us all remember, what the Spirit assures us, “That there is a day of salvation, an accepted time;”—that this day and this time passes away continually; and if we do not lay hold of it, the day of wrath will follow;—that there is a time when we may be heard, and therefore a time when we shall not be heard,—when the Spirit of God will no longer strive with us,—when sinners have not been bettered by the means of grace and salvation offered them, but have long despised and resisted the Spirit of God, and grieved him by their evil deeds. In short, there is a time when the dresser of the vineyard will no longer intercede for the fruitless tree, there being no longer hopes of its being bettered by his pains.

*Who this charitable Dresser of the vineyard is, and what methods he takes to preserve his plantation from being cut down, we now come to consider.*

Who can this be, but the LORD JESUS CHRIST, who is our Advocate with God, interceding for those whom he hath redeemed with his most precious blood; and who, by his Holy Spirit, and by his Ministers, is continually labouring to make us bring forth fruits worthy of a place in his vineyard; and to prevent, if possible, the being rooted up, and cast out to be burned? To this end, “he speaks once, yea twice, though men perceive it not;”—by mercies, by judgments, by disappointments; by all other methods most likely to make us consider the end of our creation, and to pursue it with concern and zeal.

It is He who sends his Ministers, to exhort, to warn, to give men notice, of the threatened ruin, if they do not repent and amend their bad lives. They are these his Ministers, who join with their Lord and Master, to beg of God to continue his patience towards the flock committed to their several charges;—who remember you in their prayers to God for you;—who beg of God to root out all growing vices, to pardon what is past, and that iniquity may not be your ruin.

And happy is it for their flock when they do this; and woe to them if they do it not!—for “they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account.”

Which brings us to the next thing that this parable puts us in mind of, *the dreadful*

*end of impenitent sinners.* “If it bear fruit, well; if not, after that thou shalt cut it down;” that is, I will intercede for it no longer; all the labour bestowed upon it is in vain; no fruit can be expected from it; it is only fit to be burned.

Would men but apply this to themselves, and suppose this should be their own case, it would make the stoutest heart to tremble.

But the great misfortune of too many is this; they will not believe that they are in so great danger, till it be too late to prevent it, till the axe is laid to the root of the tree, and it is just going to be cut down.

In short, you see, Christians, that there is an appointed time in which God offers grace to sinners, and an opportunity of working out their salvation, by glorifying God, and mending their corrupt nature: And that when this is neglected and past, they have nothing to expect but judgment without mercy.

It was this consideration that made the compassionate vine-dresser [our blessed Saviour] to weep over his vineyard [the people of Jerusalem] in these most sorrowful words: “Ah! happy had it been for thee, if thou hadst known in this thy day, the things that belong to thy peace; but now they are hid from thine eyes;” that is, by thine own sins and infidelity, in not giving heed to the warnings thou hast had, thou hast at last provoked God to leave thee to thine own blindness, which will end in thy destruction.

Thus, my Christian brethren, matters stand with all of us. We are gone astray from God: God has appointed us a time in which to return to him and to our duty; if we lose this time, we are certainly undone.

This is not what he desires, and therefore he spares us as men capable of knowing their danger, and the way to avoid it; as we are told he did with the Canaanites; not that he was unable to have destroyed them at once, but that executing his judgments by little and little, he gave them space for repentance.

And thus he deals with all mankind; and they that perish, perish through their own perverse fault and blindness. They will not see the time and opportunities which God, the merciful God, affords them, in which to work out their salvation.

Have a little patience, and I will shew you the true reason of this; why we do not see and acknowledge the kindness and mercy of God in all the dispensations of his providence, which are designed to awaken and call us to our duty.

If he visits us with sickness, we consider it only as the pure effect of natural causes,

• Wisd. xii. 8.

Y y

and



and what every body is subject to, and which could not be avoided, though perhaps it was intended as the last call to repentance that ever we are to have.

If any thing befalls us that is very grievous to nature; as loss of children, of goods, or of limbs; we are apt to ascribe it to chance, mere chance; whereas nothing can happen to us, but by the order or permission of God; and it is designed for our good, if we could be persuaded to consider it,—either to awaken us when we grow careless, or to lead us to our duty, or to punish us in this world, that we may escape it in the next.

If the Ministers of God warn you of the danger you are in by reason of your careless and very sinful lives, you are too apt to look upon it as their business to say such things, rather than your concern to lay them to heart.

If God gives you health, you are apt to forget that ever you must die; and if he lays you upon the bed of sickness, you are as apt to satisfy your minds with good resolutions, if ever you shall recover, which are too often forgot.

If he gives you uneasiness of mind, or trouble of conscience, you are impatient till you can cast off fear, and be as easy as the rest of the world: And if he gives you peace of mind, you conclude all is safe, and there is no need at all to fear.

But there is still another cause of men's blindness, and neglect of their salvation; and that is, a constant *burry of worldly business*, and success in it; it being utterly impossible to love God, when we love the world and its idols with all our hearts. Such people are too much distracted to hear their compassionate Redeemer asking them this concerning question, "What will it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

And if *business* is apt to blind us, much more will *success* in it do it effectually. The Holy David confesseth, that this was his own case, and acknowledges God's great mercy in letting him see the danger he was in. "In my prosperity, I said, I shall never be removed; but thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled;" and this trouble was of more use to him than all his prosperity.

*Want of humility*, and a just fear for ourselves, is another, and the greatest cause of our unfruitfulness under the means of grace and salvation.

We are apt to have a good opinion of our state, and therefore we fear no evil, nor see any danger. We say, with the Jews, we

have Abraham to our Father; so we have Jesus Christ for our Redeemer; and yet with that great advantage they became the most abandoned of all people. And ought it not to humble us to consider how little we are better than they, with all the advantages we have, and do therefore boast of?

We that profess to believe that we are made for the everlasting possession of an heavenly Canaan, and yet seldom think of fitting ourselves for it;—

We that know we are made for the fellowship of Angels, and yet can be content with the pleasures proper to beasts;—

We that know that we have a time appointed to work out our salvation, and yet defer this mighty concern "till the night come, when no man can work;"—

We that profess to believe an everlasting life of happiness or misery, and yet seldom consider which of the two is like to be our own portion;—

We that know that we are sinners, and yet do live as if we had never done amiss, or stand in no need of pardon;—

We that are in danger every moment to be snatched away, and are sure, if we die in our sins unrepented of, to be made the scorn of Devils, and yet to be as unconcerned as if the command of life and death were in our own hands!—

Gracious God! that these considerations might beget in us all a deep humility, that weighing the uncertainty of our days, and the work we have to do, the necessity of making our peace with God, and the comfort of living to bring forth fruit meet for salvation, our hearts may be filled with Godly fear, and that we may see in this our day, and follow, the things that make for our peace, lest they be for ever hid from our eyes!

But I would not only raise your passions and fears, without pointing out to you the true way of turning them to your advantage. Our Lord himself has directed us what to do when we are under a concern for what may become of us when we die. "Watch and pray, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape; for ye know not when your Lord cometh, whether at even, or at midnight, or at the cock-crowing, or in the morning."

Why now, Christians, this is our appointed time; this is our day of salvation; which would not be continued to us, but that God waits to be gracious.

Our duty is to *watch* against sin, and the temptations that lead to it, and *pray* for grace, always remembering, that if we lead a careless



a careless, thoughtless life, our sentence is already passed, with that of the unfruitful tree; "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

To put this command of our Saviour into practice, these few hints will be well worth your remembering:—*Lose not the sight of death; and forget not that it may come when you least think of it.*

You will then be apt to make good use of the present time; for who knows how short it may be?

You will take every occasion of doing what good you can; for who can assure you that you shall ever have another?

You will be moderate in your concern for the good things of this life, when you are so very soon to be possessed of pleasures that are to last for ever?

You will be sober and temperate, lest that day should overtake you, as it has done many a one before you, when you have not your thoughts and senses about you.

You will be more patient under afflictions, which God appoints for your good, since these cannot last very long.

You will be kind and charitable according to your power, knowing that you are very soon to go to the treasure which you have laid up in heaven.

You will more readily forgive all that have offended you; for why should you be enemies, when in a very little time you expect to meet in Paradise, and be friends there for ever?

You will be inclined to be just to all men, and wrong none; for who would hazard his soul for that which he must so soon leave behind him?

In one word, you will be very serious; for so the thoughts of death will make you of course. You will be generally devout; for who can think of another life, and not passionately wish and pray that his portion may be with the blessed when he dies?

And this is the only way to make our lives easy, and our death happy.

But is this care and concern necessary for all? Most certainly so. "What I say unto you, I say unto all, *Watch*," saith our Lord.

The truth is this, and I pray you take notice and remember it; that before we leave this world, as we hope to go to a better, our corrupt nature must be changed, and we must endeavour, by the grace of God, to be restored to such a condition as man was at first created in, that we may be fit for the company of Angels, and of just men made perfect.

And this is to be done, by forsaking every evil way, every known sin; by standing against the temptations we meet with; by denying our own corrupt desires, which would lead us to dishonour God; by making it part of our daily prayers to God, to give us a *new heart, new desires, greater strength, and better resolutions*; and lastly, by exercising ourselves in acts of piety and charity, that we may thereby recommend ourselves, as we certainly shall do, to God, for greater degrees of grace *here*, and for a favourable sentence at the day of judgment.

To conclude, with some short but useful observations:—While we are alive, we have reason to hope, that the sentence of the unfruitful tree is not yet passed upon us; but then let us not forget, that when the door is shut, there is no longer time to cry for mercy.

And one thing, which is not so well considered as it ought to be, I must leave upon your memories;—That at whatever distance the Day of Judgment may be off, yet *happiness* or *misery* will be the portion of every man and woman when they die. This is plain from the Word of God. Good men's souls are carried, as the soul of Lazarus was, by the Angels into Paradise, a place of rest and peace:—On the other hand, the souls of the wicked are carried to a place of misery and torment, as was that of the hard-hearted rich man; both the one and the other to be kept unto the judgment of the great day.

You will, I hope, expect no other arguments to persuade you to consider how you live, and how you die.

Remember, in the next place, that the time of death is kept from us, that we may be always thinking of it, always preparing for it, and that we may not forget the only thing for which we came into the world.

Indeed God, in the ways of his providence, puts us in mind of our latter end by a thousand instances and a thousand ways. People are every day going out of the world of all ages, of all conditions, by all manner of ways; by *lingering, sudden, and by untimely deaths*:—All these have passed their time of trial, and their souls are confined to their proper places of happiness or misery till the judgment of the great day.

This ought to affect us, if we would but consider how soon this *may* be, how soon it *must* be, our own case.

And may the good Spirit of God fix these truths in all our hearts; for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*



## S E R M O N LVII.

THE TRUE CHRISTIAN METHOD OF EDUCATING THE CHILDREN BOTH OF  
THE RICH AND THE POOR.\*

A C T S xiii. 48.

—*As many as were ordained to [that is, disposed or prepared for] Eternal Life, believed.*

THE CHARITY SCHOOLS being designed to give the *Children of the Poor* not merely an *Orderly Education*, though that itself is a mighty blessing both to them and to the publick; but more especially a *Christian Education*, whereby they may become happy to all eternity;—I cannot think of a more proper subject for this *solemn meeting*, than *this* I have made choice of; which intimates to us, *that there are certain dispositions necessary to qualify men for receiving and believing the Gospel to any saving purposes.*—“As many as were ordained to,” or prepared for, “eternal life, believed.”

Having made this out, we shall then proceed to enquire—

First, *What these dispositions are?*

Secondly, *What manner of education is most proper to imprint them in the minds of those to whom the Gospel is proposed?* In order, in the first place, to prevent them from making shipwreck of the faith which they have once received; and, secondly, to oblige them to live according to the precepts of the Gospel which they have embraced.

But I must first observe to you, that this text has been sometimes made use of to favour an opinion, which, if true, would render all education, with regard to another world, entirely useless. The words *ordained to eternal life* having been understood to mean, that such as did not believe the Gospel to saving purposes, it was not their own fault; they *were not ordained to it*, nor to that eternal life to which a true faith in Jesus Christ entitles his servants;—that they were never *effectually called* to believe the Gospel, and to obey its laws;—that men are *born to unfortunate ends*, and to the ways that lead to them.

This has been an old complaint and refuge of sinners: “The foolishness of man” (saith Solomon) “perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.” As if God could take pleasure in the destruction

or misery of his creatures.—An opinion so absurd, that I should not spend one moment of your time in confuting it, but that it is absolutely necessary, that such as are *Candidates for Eternity*, of whom so great a number are now present, as well as they that have the care of their education, should see the mischievous consequence of falling into an error, which would make God *the author of sin*,—his commands unjust,—the Holy Scriptures inconsistent with themselves,—and render all the worthy endeavours of parents, of masters, and of the Societies for educating of children, *useless*, and even *ridiculous*.

We need go no farther than two verses back, to see this error confuted by the Apostle himself: He there tells the *Jews*, that it was necessary, (that is, God had so appointed it) that the Gospel should first be preached to them; but that they, by putting the Word of God from them, did, by that act, render themselves *unworthy of everlasting life*.

If to this we add the declarations which God himself has made,—*That he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;—that he desireth not the death of a sinner, but that he should turn from his sin, and be saved;*—we shall see plainly, that it is in the power of every soul, by the grace of God, to be happy, provided they put on firm resolutions of working out their own salvation with *fear and trembling*; that is, with a concern answerable to the loss they will otherwise sustain.

We may indeed, as many of the Jews did, reject the counsel of God for our good; but then our destruction will be from ourselves, and not from any decree of God.

The truth is, the word here translated *ordained*, signifies no more than *prepared*, or *disposed* for eternal life; and so it is translated in the margin of our Bibles: that is, they that were *well disposed*; they that *feared God*, and were afraid for themselves; they that did not resist the counsel and grace of

\* Preached in the year 1724, before the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge.



God; these, when the Gospel was preached to them, very readily embraced it: while they that lived at all adventures, and feared no evil, who hated knowledge, and would not choose the fear of the Lord, such as these would not, could not believe, and consequently could not be saved.

This premised, we now come to consider the great truth intimated in the text:

I. *That there are certain dispositions necessary to fit men for receiving the Gospel to any saving purposes.*

Thus it was prophesied of the Messiah, before he appeared in the flesh,<sup>a</sup> and foretold who would, and who would not receive him.—*The Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, for they would receive his message;—to bind up the broken-hearted, for they would be glad of help and comfort;—to proclaim liberty to the captives, for they and they only who should be sensible of their bondage, would be glad to be set at liberty.*

Accordingly, when our Lord did come, he invited such to be his hearers, to whom he knew his doctrine would be acceptable. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.”—And when he was reproached for conversing with sinners, he only gave this answer, “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick: I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

Why, were not they all sinners? Yes. But that which is intimated in this answer is this, that there are sinners who are not at all sensible of their bad condition: and their condition, for that very reason, is the more deplorable, because they would not look out for help; while such as feared God, and were in fear for themselves, were exceedingly pleased to hear our Lord declare, that “He came from God, to seek and to save that which was lost.”—These, and these only, heard him with patience; considered the tendency of his doctrine; examined his miracles without prejudice; and were at last convinced, that *he was indeed a teacher come from God;—that he had the words of eternal life;—that he made known things of the greatest concern to them.* They therefore embraced his doctrine, and resolved to obey his laws.

The Apostles followed their Master in this exactly, and proposed the Gospel to such as were previously disposed to receive it:—“Whoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent;” and such, and such only, did receive it.—The Centurion, amongst others, was an in-

stance of this, and of God’s purpose and goodness to all such as improve that light and grace which he vouchsafes them. He was a *devout man, feared God, gave much alms, and prayed to God continually*; and, being thus prepared for greater mercies, God, by a providence extraordinary, brought him to a knowledge of the Gospel.

On the other hand, we find too many of the Jews so prejudiced against Christ and his doctrine, that nothing could convince them, no not miracles themselves. A remarkable instance of this we have in the fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles;—the Apostles having cured a man that was lame from his mother’s womb; and this only by saying the word, and it was done:—A sure proof that God was with them, because this was the very way by which he had created the Heavens and the Earth.—The Scribes and the Pharisees saw this: *We cannot, say they, deny it*; neither could they say, that the doctrine the Apostles preached was unworthy of God. And what was the consequence of this? Why, indeed, a very strange one. *They ordered them not to speak any more in the name of Christ*, (that very name by which the man had been made whole) and threatened them severely, if they should do so.

Which history will be an eternal testimony against those who are ever calling for more evidence, and making objections against received truths; when it is plainly their own *obstinacy, their prejudice, or their wickedness*, which hinders them from perceiving the Truth,—that Truth which is *worthy of all men to be received*,—the interest of all men to embrace it,—and which having been so clearly revealed, and abundantly confirmed, leaves all men without excuse, who shall reject it.

For after all, reject it men will, if their minds are not prepared to receive it. “If our Gospel,” saith the Apostle, “be hid,” if it will not be received, “it is hid to them that are lost; whom the God of this world has blinded.”

So that it can never be an objection against the Christian Religion, that all men, so soon as the Gospel is preached to them, do not see the truth, and close with its most gracious offers of pardon and happiness: For if men are not disposed to be serious; if they are engaged in sinful courses; if they shun that light which would shew them to themselves; and despise those means which God has ordained for their conversion; it is no wonder they do not, nay it is impossible they should, believe the Gospel.

<sup>a</sup> Isaiah lxi. 1.    <sup>c</sup> Luke xix. 10.    <sup>f</sup> Acts xiii. 26.

<sup>e</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 3.



And this comes to pass, *not by any fatal decree of God*, but from an utter indisposition to hearken to the truth, and to see their interest in it. And it is also occasioned by a custom of acting against reason and conscience;—by leading a life contrary to holiness;—by grieving the Holy Spirit of God, by which they had been sanctified;—and making it their choice not to see the consequence of a life spent in ignorance and sin.

For this reason it is, that children are the most proper subjects of an *education* which regards *another life*,—before they have been suffered to grow wild;—before their souls shall have been *polluted*, their senses *depraved*, their minds and memories *corrupted*, by evil principles, and evil examples;—for when it is thus with them, we shall find it the hardest thing in the world to persuade them even to hear what we have to say on the part of religion.

Whereas, they that have the happiness of being restrained betimes, and trained up in the fear of God, these will hear and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save their souls.

And it is for this reason, that the great *enemy of souls* has, of late, been most indefatigably industrious, and has set all his agents at work, to vilify and decry this method of instruction, and the *Charity Schools*, which are designed to give the children of the poor an early knowledge of God and of their duty, before sin and hell have got dominion over them.

But this should not discourage those who are engaged in this good work;—a work, which, if it had not been of God, would have come to nought long ere this, considering the malice of Satan, and the restless endeavours of his instruments, to bring an evil report upon it; which, instead of making us uneasy, or weary in well-doing, will only oblige us to consider with attention, what has been, or can be, objected against these Schools of Piety; and to resolve to use our utmost endeavours to make them effectually answer all the ends of charity proposed by those that *manage*, and by those that shall *contribute* towards supporting them.

Now, as we are sincere *Advocates* for this charity, so must we be faithful *Monitors*, and always put you in mind, that the first and great *design* of these *Schools* is to make children Christians in *deed* as well as in *name*; lest not knowing, or not feeling, the power of religion in their souls, they fall into the vices of the age, and become a scandal to their education, and a real grief and offence to all that have contributed towards carrying it on.

My meaning is this:—Children may be, and often have been, taught the general *Truths* and *Duties* of *Christianity*, without any great good following, for want of such previous *knowledge* and *dispositions* as we have been speaking of, such as are necessary to fit them for receiving the *truth* in the *love* of it.

II. *What this knowledge, and these dispositions are*, we now come to consider.

And first; As “the fear of God is the “beginning of wisdom;” so are *the fear of God*, and *the knowledge of ourselves*, the foundation of saving faith in Jesus Christ. “To “you that fear God, (saith the Prophet) he “will arise with healing in his wings.”<sup>h</sup> He may indeed be seen by others, but he comes *with healing in his wings* to those only who *fear God*.

Jesus cried, “If any man thirst, let him “come unto me, and drink;” plainly intimating, that people must have a *sense of their wants*, they must have an *appetite*, before they can so much as think of going to the living waters to quench their thirst. “Thou say’st, (saith the Spirit)<sup>i</sup> “that I am rich; and “knowest not that thou art wretched, and “miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. —A sad condition indeed, to be miserable without knowing it, and consequently without any inclination to look out for help!

But then is not this the case of the greatest part of mankind? And *ought not the cure of this malady to begin here?* Especially with respect to those that are professedly taken in hand to be delivered from this state of blindness and misery.

Should not this be our first and great concern,—*To plant the fear of God in their hearts betimes?*—By giving them a just and distinct knowledge of God and his attributes,—by making them sensible of the relation they bear to him, and that they are accountable to his justice for every thing they do,—by explaining to them the condition they are brought into by the fall of our first parents;—by shewing them to themselves, and convincing them, from their own reason and experience, that things are wretchedly amiss with them, that they are by nature under the power and dominion of sin, and that if they were left to themselves, they would go on to obey it to their eternal ruin;—that people need not be at pains to make themselves miserable, for they will be so of course if they make no resistance;—in short, by making them *see and feel the sad estate they are in without the blessing of a Redeemer*, we shall lay a good foundation for saving knowledge. But without that, the general duties of the Christian Religion may be taught without effect. And they that hear

<sup>h</sup> Mal. iv. 2.    <sup>i</sup> Rev. iii. 7.



them may live in a formal profession of Christianity all their days, and die in a condition not better than that of Infidels.

Do but attend to what I am going to say, and you will be convinced, that this is the *likeliest*, if not the *only* way, both *to convert*, and *to confirm them* in the ways of religion and virtue; namely, To open their eyes, that they may see with whom they have to do; and that they may perceive how unworthy they are of the least of the mercies God designs for them; and how liable they are to be for ever undone, if they are not careful for themselves.

For, first, *this is the likeliest way to convert them*,—by bringing them to a *seriousness of temper*, than which nothing is more necessary to a true conversion;—by representing to their minds *things of the greatest concern to them*; the *value of their souls*, which they ought not to hazard, *though they were to get the whole world*; the happiness they are made for, and the misery they may bring upon themselves, if they shall oppose God's gracious design towards them.

The consideration of these things often set before them will not suffer them to be indifferent; they will learn to be afraid for themselves; and they will consider with attention what is their true interest, and WHAT THEY MUST DO TO BE SAVED. Fear being that passion which God makes use of to make all his other graces effectual. Even Noah himself, great as his faith was, stood in need of this passion, to make him do what God had commanded him, to save himself from perishing:—"Moved with fear," saith the Apostle,\* "he prepared an ark for the saving of his house."

Besides, it is *this disposition* which must make them fit objects of God's grace and compassion;—"To this man will I look," saith the Lord, "even to him that trembleth at my word."

If to this we add, that it is *this grace*, and this only, that can make repentance and a religious life *less discouraging* and *burthensome* than they are apt to appear to an unregenerate mind, we shall still see more reason to press it upon those whom we are about to instruct unto Eternal Life.

To deny themselves a great many things for which they are naturally very fond; to mortify their lusts and affections, which are as dear to them as their lives; to take up the cross, even before it is laid upon them. These are duties which corrupt nature would avoid, if God, by putting his fear into their hearts, did not shew them the danger and the necessity of doing any thing to escape it.

\* Heb. xi. 7.

† Isaiah lxvi. 2.

And here one cannot but wonder at those, who, for the most part forgetting this only sure argument of conversion, do hope to persuade people to forsake their sins, and lead a religious life, by arguments purely moral, or on account of worldly inconveniencies: You will ruin your reputation, your health, your estate; you will disoblige your friends. On the other hand, *Virtue is its own reward*. How honourable is it to be just to one's word, and true in one's dealings! How unworthy a rational man to live like a beast!

One may very well question, whether any man, ever since the fall of Adam, was converted by arguments of this nature. Alas! our corrupt hearts will easily get over every thing that can be said which only regards this world. But who can be so hardy as to slight *Eternal Ruin*; or despise *his power*, and *his displeasure*, who can destroy both body and soul in hell; when represented in terms suited to the capacities of those to whom we speak, and pressed upon them with becoming seriousness?

It is for this reason, and because of ourselves we have so little inclination to consider, as well as little power to choose what is good,—that God in his Holy Word, both in the Old and New Testament, has so frequently set before us the terrors of the Lord, and of the world to come;—that he has made known to us the certain miserable portion of the wicked in a future state, in order to awaken us,—to fill our hearts with fears of future evils, while we continue impenitent,—to make us *serious*,—to make the pleasures of the world less palatable,—to break the power of temptations;—or, in one word, to dispose us for *Eternal Life*.

Neither is it of less use to confirm them in the ways of Virtue and Piety. For it will represent to their minds—the dangers they have escaped,—the sad condition they had been in, had not God vouchsafed them the grace of repentance; which will be a means of curing them of that carelessness and presumption that are the ruin of an infinite number of souls. And seeing the circumstances of this life, as well as the commands of Jesus Christ, require that Christians should be always upon their guard, nothing but a great fear of miscarrying could reconcile them to a duty so uneasy to flesh and blood.

But above all things, this fear will create in young people a tenderness of conscience, than which nothing will be of greater use in the whole course of their lives, to preserve them from falling. Temptations may be sudden;—they may not always have time to consider the evil tendency of actions,—may not always know what their duty requires of them;—but if their conscience is tender and greatest



awake, they will be sure to keep at the greatest distance from every thing they have reason to fear may offend God; which will often serve instead of time to consider, instead of knowledge to direct, instead of friends to advise with, in time of danger.

Besides these, there is one other good effect this *fear* will have upon those who are early possessed of it; and this is, *It will oblige them to live in a constant dependance upon God*,—to be ever looking up to him for pardon and grace, for light and assistance, for protection against their adversaries, and against that *security*, the fruits of which are, *Negligence*,—*a bold venturing upon temptations*,—*a wicked life*,—and *a reprobate mind*.

I will only add, that this method of education appears to me to be *the very shortest way of giving children a thorough knowledge of their duty both to God and man*. For besides this, that it gives God the first possession of their hearts, (which is sure no small advantage) it determines their choice betimes; makes them afraid of the dangers that surround them, and gives them an abhorrence of those vices which are so dangerous even to be acquainted with; and which one needs but once taste of, to become for ever slaves to them.

But then if we consider the age, and the slow capacities of those we have to deal with;—the many precepts of the Gospel, and the different circumstances of life, wherein they are to be applied;—we should utterly despair of giving them a full sight and knowledge of their duty, had not God directed us to this short method,—To teach them first of all to *fear him*; which will supply the want of a great deal of *learning*, a good memory, and a great deal of time, which every body cannot be master of.

So that *natural conscience*, the general rules of religion, as they are summed up in our catechism, and which every body may learn; these, assisted by the *fear of God*, will be sufficient to direct any Christian in any state of life, in which the providence of God shall place him.

And indeed, as it is but too sure that very many make a shift, with *good parts*, and a *great deal of learning*, to be eternally ruined; so, to the praise of God be it said, we often see many poor people, with *very small attainments*,—but who have been bred up in the *fear of God*,—as true lovers of God, as careful not to offend him, as constant and devout in worshipping him, as just and conscientious in their dealings with men, and as sober and temperate in their lives; and consequently have as good a title to the blessings of Paradise, and the Kingdom of Heaven, as they that have had the greatest advantages of learning and education.

In short; *this foundation being once well laid*, all other Christian graces and virtues will follow of course. We shall love God proportionably to the mercies we are sensible we have received from him, and the dangers from which he has delivered us;—we shall hope for all favourable allowances from him, whom we know, we fear, and love;—we shall honour him, and every thing that relates to him; and we shall serve him truly all our days. And being convinced, that God has made the *Love of our Neighbour* a proof of our fear and love of him, we shall always be afraid of doing any of those things to others, which he hates and has forbidden.

Lastly; knowing that our bodies are the Temples of the Living God, we shall endeavour to keep them holy and undefiled, as the Temples of God should be; and shall always be afraid of profaning and polluting them, and of doing any of those vile things which may drive the Spirit of God from his temple, and leave it to be possessed by devils.

But I must not tire your patience; and therefore I proceed, in the last place, to consider,

III. *What manner of education is most proper to imprint the fear of God in the hearts of those whom we undertake to instruct*; in order to prevent them, if possible, from making shipwreck of the faith which they have once received; and to oblige them to live according to the precepts of the Gospel which they have embraced.

There is indeed one truth, which, if it would be believed, would make people more desirous to learn their duty, than any body could be to teach them; and that is, *that a Virtuous Education is really preferable to all the wealth and other advantages of the world without it*.

But forasmuch as this will very hardly be received, we must take another method, and endeavour to possess people's hearts with the *fear of God*, and a *fear for themselves*, in order to prevail with them to lead a godly and a christian life. We must, for instance, set before them the Power and Majesty of that God with whom they have to do;—that all his laws are holy, just, and good; that therefore he expects obedience to them; that he sees all their actions, hears all their words, and knows the very thoughts of their hearts;—that though he is infinitely good and merciful, yet that he can be angry with sinners, and severely too, as is plain from the many judgments recorded in scripture for our example;—and that he will call all men to an account for the talents he has given them. That not only wicked, but unprofitable servants will then be punished. *That therefore it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living*



living God. And that God has made these truths known to them, on purpose that they may not ruin themselves eternally.

Let them therefore be taught to live always as in the presence of God, as the most effectual way to preserve in their hearts a sense of their dependance upon him. *Walk before me, and be thou perfect*, is a rule given by God himself; it is a rule that the most ignorant will be able to apply in all the circumstances of life; and the most learned cannot have a better.

You are in the presence of God. He is present therefore to punish you, if you break his laws;—he is present to reward you, if you do your best to please him;—he is present to assist you, when you want help;—he is present to defend you against all your adversaries. So that life and death are set before you.

They are then to be made acquainted with their own condition; what they are by nature; what they would be, if left entirely to themselves; what they may hope for, by giving themselves up to God; and what will certainly be the consequence of their living without God in the world. *That they are by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath*, is what they often hear, and often repeat; but then they should know, that *to be born in sin*, is to come into the world a creature in whom God can take no pleasure;—a creature in whom are the seeds of all manner of wickedness, ready to spring up, and bring him to destruction both of soul and body;—a creature no more able to help himself out of this sad estate, than a man that is dead;—and that yet he must be delivered out of this estate before he leaves this world, or he will remain under the power of everlasting death, of everlasting misery.

For this they ought to know further, that they are not only *born in sin*, but by conversing with others as corrupt as themselves, they will become still more wicked the longer they live, and more offensive to God, if not restrained by his grace. It will be easy to convince them of this, by obliging them to consider those many people over whom sin and Satan have got the dominion; how they are slaves to the most unreasonable passions; and having sold themselves *to work wickedness*, they are at last come to that pass, *that they cannot cease from sin*. So that neither the fear of temporal nor eternal punishments can restrain them.

Then let them see the folly of that most common delusion,—that it is *impossible* they should ever fall into the *abominable sins* they see, and every day hear others guilty of,—a delusion that has been the ruin of an infinite number of souls.

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Let them know, therefore, that nobody ever was extremely graceless and wicked at once;—that one sin makes way for and brings on another;—that every one who lives in any known sin is advancing to a state of atheism, of wishing *that there were no God*, and at last of living as if there were none;—that they are of the very same race and make with those very people, whose wickednesses they are astonished at;—and that the same evil spirit, that tempted them to those abominations, is *ever walking about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may be permitted to devour*.

Lastly; let this truth be often inculcated, that *we are not so much masters of ourselves as we are apt to imagine*;—governed we must be, either by the Spirit of God, or by an evil spirit;—and that whenever men grieve the Holy Spirit, and provoke him to withdraw his protection, that moment Satan takes them under his power, and, as the Scriptures speak, *leads them captive at his will*.

These considerations, if any thing, will make young people afraid for themselves, especially if they are often put in mind, that a very few years will determine their fate for ever, and they will be happy or miserable to all eternity.

But will not this way of dealing with children make them *melancholy*? By no means. It may make them *serious*, and that they ought to be; and they ought to be so betimes, lest they be never so as long as they live. That which makes people melancholy is—when they have wrong apprehensions of God, as if he had ordained them for *misery*; or when they are shewn the danger they are in, without the way to escape. This indeed would be a ready way to drive them to despair.

But when, at the same time that they see the bad estate they are in by nature, they are made to understand the gracious goodness of God in the manner of their redemption;—how he sent his only Son to take our nature upon him, in order to deliver us from this state of sin and misery;—that he is in him *reconciling the world unto himself*;—that for his sake he will overlook the untowardness of our nature; restore us to his favour; give us all the aids necessary to do what he requires of us; and that, if we continue to serve him faithfully all our days, he will make us happy for ever;—there will then be no reason for *melancholy*, much less for *despair*.

But on the contrary, they that are thus instructed will easily perceive the *reasonableness* and the *necessity* of all the duties which Christianity requires of them, and will readily close with them, whenever they are proposed to them. They will see, for instance,



stance, and be sensibly affected with the love and kindness of God in touching their hearts with a sense of the danger they were in, which must needs be very great, since *none but the Son of God could deliver them*. They will highly value the favour of their deliverance, as they will have reason to do; and this will very naturally lead them *to love the Lord their God with all their heart*, and to do what they believe will please him, though it should thwart their own inclinations.

When they shall be convinced, as they ought to be, that God requires obedience to his laws, for this reason only, that we may not be miserable, they will avoid every sin he has forbidden, not because it is scandalous, or punishable by man, but because it will *displease God*, and because it will utterly unfit them for Heaven and Happiness.

When once they have been made sensible, what little power they had to deliver themselves out of that sad estate in which sin had involved them, they will see it highly reasonable to give all the glory of their deliverance to God; and to cast themselves entirely upon him for grace and strength to carry them through all future difficulties and dangers. And this will very naturally lead them to *pray to him continually* to deliver them from a *corrupt world*, *infinite errors*, and most *powerful enemies*, which they are sure to meet with in their way to Heaven.

If they have been made truly sensible of the *corruption*, the *weakness*, and the *inconstancy* of their *nature*, and that Satan is ever ready to tempt them to their ruin, they will see, and they will acknowledge, the *reasonableness* and the absolute *necessity* of *mortification* and *self-denial*, of watching and walking warily all their days.

Whenever they are in danger of *backsliding*, they will be put in mind of the sad condition of that man in the Gospel, whom our Lord has mentioned for our warning, to whom an evil Spirit, after he had been turned out, returned with seven other spirits more wicked than himself; how the *last estate of that man was worse than the first*.

And having been often told, as they should be, that whenever the Spirit of God forsakes them, an evil spirit will take the government of them; and that every wilful sin sets them further out of God's favour, and gives the Devil still more power over them;—whenever they shall have done amiss, they will immediately ask pardon, that they may not put themselves out of God's protection.

In one word; they will not look upon Christianity as a *state of idleness*, but consider it, as indeed it is, as a *state of trial*, in which

they are placed for a very short while, in order to be restored to the *image of God*, in which they were at first created; and that if they lose this opportunity, they are for ever undone. And when they see so many about them in the very *way of perdition*, they will bless God for the happy Providence, and for all those whom he has made instruments of their conversion, before evil habits were become a second nature, before evil conversation had corrupted their manners, or evil company their principles.

And it is much to be wished, that they who stand charged with the *education* of those of *better circumstances* than those we are now concerned for, would seriously consider, whether it is not for want of laying this foundation,—for want of possessing their souls betimes with the *fear of God*, and with a concern for their everlasting welfare,—that that *learning*, and other *accomplishments*, which are intended to qualify them for passing through the world with reputation and advantage, do only prove a greater snare to them.

For it is too plain to be denied, that very many of those whom God has distinguished by *honours*, *liberal educations*, and great *estates*, are extremely corrupted by these *advantages*; they are often too *learned* to be instructed by their proper teachers, too *great* to be reprov'd when they are in an error, too *high* to submit to the laws of the Gospel, or too much taken up with the affairs of this world, to be seriously concerned for that which is to come:—And all this for want of being first instructed in the *fear of God*, and the dangers they are exposed to if they should be so unhappy as to follow their own inclinations;—for want of being humbled with the knowledge of the Majesty of God, who putteth down one, and setteth up another;—for want of knowing the dangers and the temptations of an high estate;—for want of being convinced that they are as much subject to the laws of Christ, and as liable to be eternally ruined if they are not so, as the meanest on earth;—for want of being often told, that the more they have, the more they are to answer for;—and lastly, for want of being made sensible of the vile *ingratitude* of living only to dishonour their great benefactor.

We are obliged to say it again; it is the want of this kind of *instruction* that is the source of that corruption which spreads itself so universally; while a superficial knowledge of the Christian Religion, of the commands of God, and of the way of worshipping him, is called a *Christian Education*. And therefore it much concerns all those whose hearts God has moved to set up these *Schools of Charity*, to see, that the children,

in



in them at least, be taught in the first place to *fear God*; to know, and to be *afraid* for themselves, and of his *judgments*. And then we might hope to see a number of young people sober and serious in their behaviour, and when grown up, peaceable in their lives, upright in their dealings, obedient to their Governors, and *examples of piety* to all about them.

And what encouragement would all good Christians have to contribute, upon every occasion, towards carrying on so excellent a work!—With what grateful hearts would poor *parents* embrace these opportunities of having their children taught, not only how to live, but how to be for ever happy!—What thankful *returns* would many of these make, if ever God should enable them, in contributing towards the Christian education of others!—And lastly, how much concerned would our Governors be, to give all the encouragement imaginable to these worthy undertakings, and severely punish those who shall endeavour to blast so good a design!

For indeed, it is *true Religion that must support the State*; not only as it is a means of averting God's Judgments, but as it is the most effectual means of keeping men within the bounds of duty and obedience; *the fear of God being the only sure principle of loyalty to be depended on*. The *fear of death* itself being but a poor restraint, in comparison of the *dread of God's displeasure*, when once the heart is possessed with a just sense of it.

And if ever we shall be so happy as to have the generality of our youth thus educated, the *Civil Government* will soon find its interest in it. They that shall be taught to *fear God* will as surely *honour the King*, and them that are put in authority under

him. Men will obey those that have the rule over them, not only for *wrath*,—for fear of temporal punishment, but for *conscience sake*—for fear of offending God. The *sacredness of oaths* will be more regarded, and Christians will study to be *quiet*, and to *do their own business*, and leave the government of the world to those on whom the providence of God has laid that burthen.

And though the corruption of human nature will always make laws, and civil penalties, and magistrates to put them in execution and to decree justice, necessary; yet this burthen will become every day lighter, when the number of *untaught* and *undisciplined* people shall be lessened;—when subjects shall become peaceable, because of the *oath of God* which is upon them;—when men shall make it their choice to be just to one another, knowing *the account they must one day give*;—and, being convinced that this is not the world they were made for, when they shall be afraid of losing the eternal happiness of the next, by being too passionately fond of this.

In short; there is no governing the *outward*, without first governing the *inward* man. “Out of the heart,” saith our Saviour, “proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, thefts, false witness, blasphemies.”<sup>m</sup>

Now; where the fear of God is, there is no room for any of these to enter; and this is the reason that I have with so much *earnestness*, and I am afraid *tediousness*, recommended a *Method of Education*, which, if religiously pursued, would in all probability promote these great ends,—the *Glory of God*, the *Good of Mankind*, the *Happiness of this Life*, and the *Blessings of the World to come*.

<sup>m</sup> Matth. xv. 19.

## S E R M O N LVIII.

### ON THE DUE OBSERVANCE OF THE SABBATH.

EXODUS XX. II.

*The Lord blessed the Sabbath-Day, and hallowed it.*

THE meaning of these words is this:—The Lord having commanded one day in seven to be kept holy, and having made it a *Sabbath*, that is, a day of rest from bodily and unnecessary labour, *he hath blessed that day*; that is, he hath joined a blessing to the due observation of it. How then comes it to pass, that *this day* is not observed

with great strictness, devotion, and thankfulness? Why, because people do not consider either the necessity, or the reason, or the advantage, of such a command. I will therefore, before I go any farther, endeavour to make you sensible of the reason and the necessity of observing one day in a week according to the commandment.

We



We are all satisfied, that we ought not to forget the God that made us; that we ought not to forget that we are *needy, sinful, helpless* creatures. Now, it is certain, we should soon forget these things, if one day in seven we were not put in mind of them. To shew you that we most certainly should do so, let us consider how many things every one of us have forgot, which we ought to have remembered. How many mercies do men receive from God, which they soon forget? How many judgments doth God send into the world, which are no longer thought on, than whilst the smart of them does last? Why, we should as surely forget the God who sends mercies and judgments, if we were not taught continually to remember him by his day which we keep holy.

There are at this day many nations in the world, which know nothing of the true God. How comes this to pass? They were all the offspring of one man, the righteous Noah, who taught his children and posterity to know God, and to worship him aright.

But you may learn from hence, that it is possible and natural for people, for whole nations, to forget the true God:—And thus it would really happen to us, if we had not days set apart, and men appointed, to keep up the knowledge and remembrance of God in our minds.

How soon do we forget our very best friends, our very children, when they have been a while dead and out of our sight? As surely should we forget, that there is a God; that we depend upon him for every thing we have or hope for; that we ought to worship him, to give him thanks, and to put our whole trust in him; that we shall be judged by him at the last day:—All which we should soon forget, if we were not often called upon and put in mind of our duty.

The Psalmist tells us, that *in his prosperity* he himself forgot God; and do not we see every day, that people who are too much busied with the cares of this world, do almost forget that there is a world to come?

What would they do, if they were not commanded upon the Lord's Day, to lay aside the business and the cares of this life, and for a while think of a better? Why, they would soon forget that there is a better; they would set up their rest here; they would only provide for themselves, and their children, an earthly maintenance, and never think of Heaven.

It is too plain all men would do so, were they left to themselves, because too many do so, notwithstanding the means of grace afforded them for their instruction and remembrance.

But why one day in seven, rather than any other portion of our time? Why, because God has so ordered it. That is the best answer I can give; and every man will be satisfied with this answer, who has a mind to submit to the wisdom of God, and will believe that he does every thing for the best.

It may be, you may think, that every body, knowing it to be their duty to serve God, would, if they were left to themselves, choose a time to do it. Why, do not we all know that *Fasting* is a Christian duty; and yet, because God has not in express words appointed us certain times of fasting, how few are there who observe any at all? And though the church of God has appointed days of fasting, yet they are neglected, despised, and the very duty itself questioned, and almost forgotten. And so it would be with the Lord's Day, and the Lord himself, if it were not expressly the command of God, REMEMBER THAT THOU KEEP HOLY THE SABBATH-DAY.

One might give many more reasons; but these are sufficient to shew the necessity of observing the Lord's Day to keep it holy. I will therefore conclude this particular with a relation which may, perhaps, be better understood by you, and better remembered, than what I have already said.

There was a certain person, who had a thoughtless and extravagant young man to his son. The father, upon his death-bed, made his son solemnly promise, that he would spend one half hour every day by himself. So easy a request, from a kind father, was very cheerfully obeyed, though it was troublesome for one who had seldom been alone, to be restrained, though for so short a time. The son at first did not see his father's meaning, or the reason of such a command, till at last, being often alone, he began to think of himself; which, by the grace of God, ended in his conversion, and then he did not only retire because his father had commanded him, but because he found it reasonable, his duty, and pleasure, so to do.

And shall we not believe, that this command of God has very often the same blessed effect? And many thousands there are in Heaven, and many, no doubt, yet on earth, who, by being obliged *by this command* to wait upon God at his house, have there found the means and the reasons of their conversion and salvation.

And now, pray consider, whether God is not kind and merciful, in giving us a law which is of so great advantage to mankind; in commanding us to keep holy one day in seven, that, being taken from all worldly labour,



labour, we may, in a manner, be obliged to think of Him, of Heaven, and of our Eternal Welfare?

To come therefore to the words of the text, "The Lord blessed the Sabbath-day, and hallowed it;" which we may consider either as a *Command*, or a *Blessing*.

I. If we consider them as a *Command*, it is a wonder that ever such a command should be neglected by any man who is in his right mind. Pray do but go along with me in considering two things; *first*, who it is that has given this command; *secondly*, to whom this command is given.

*First*; The Lord of Heaven and Earth, whose blessing alone maketh rich, who commandeth the Heavens and they obey him; by whose providence the world is governed and preserved; who holdeth our soul in life; who alone can forgive sins; who giveth food to all flesh; who causeth grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of men; in whose hands our breath is, and whose are all our ways; who is able to do exceedingly abundant for us, more than we can ask or think;—this great and good God has commanded us to observe religiously one day in seven.

*Secondly*; But what are we to whom this is commanded? Why, we are creatures who cannot live one hour without God's blessing; we are poor, weak, frail, perishing creatures, liable to a thousand miseries;—to ignorance, to want, to sickness, to sin, to death.

But what is it which God has commanded us? Why, That one day in seven we should leave all our worldly concerns in his hands;—that we should go to the public congregation, where, meeting many such helpless creatures as ourselves, we should acknowledge our own unworthiness, our own weakness, and the little power we have to help ourselves;—we should there confess, that God only can succour and preserve us,—that without his great mercy, we are, and are like to be, miserable,—and therefore we are all to join our prayers, beseeching God to pardon our sins, to pity our infirmities, to enlighten our minds with saving truth, to give us grace and strength to serve him acceptably, and for his own goodness sake, for his promise sake, and for the sake of Jesus Christ, to save our souls in the life to come.

In the mean time, we are to pray to him constantly, that he would be pleased to remove from us all such public calamities as we shall at any time labour under, or that he would make them useful for our eternal welfare, and give us such common blessings as we should most stand in need of: All

which he has encouraged us to ask for, and has promised to be found of them that diligently seek him.

Lay these things together:—God, who stands not in need of our service, has for our own good commanded us to keep holy one day in seven;—he has commanded us on that day to leave our business in his hands, and instead of working for our daily bread, only to pray for it, and for whatever else we want. We are satisfied, that without his blessing, it is to no purpose to rise early, and take late rest,—that his blessing upon one day's labour is of more value than the whole week's work without his blessing,—that therefore it is necessary we should observe this command of God, to serve him upon his own day, if we look for success in this world, or happiness in the next.

In short; God has commanded this good day to be observed, that men may never forget to whom they ought to go for help and salvation;—that men may not forget God;—and God has promised not to forget them. "Lord, what is man, that Thou hast such respect unto him, or the son of man, that Thou shouldst so regard him?" But what is man, if he despise such love, such consideration, such happiness?

II. We have now considered the *Command*. Let us proceed to consider the *Blessing* that attends it, where it is conscientiously observed:—

And first, it will be a means of bringing a blessing upon every man's private affairs; which will prosper the better the more religiously the Lord's Day is observed. Christ has expressly promised, that if we "seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," all the necessary things of this life shall be added unto us: And if we truly believe what the Scriptures have made known to us, and indeed what we find by experience, that "except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it;" we shall never look for success, nor a blessing, to come upon what we undertake, but when we carefully keep his commands, and remember to keep holy the Lord's Day; which, if we do, it will be a means of sanctifying the rest of the days of the week.

And indeed we have no right to the rest of the week, unless we first employ this day in the service of God. He that permits us to labour six days, (and who alone can make our labours prosper) has reserved one in seven to himself,—that men may know to whom they are to be thankful for their time, for all their days, for all they enjoy. And as, under the Law, a man had no right to eat the fruits of his labours, until he had



offered the first-fruits to God, and acknowledged the Lord to be the giver of all good things,—until he had praised God for his bounties in blessing the earth;—no more ought any man to look upon six days as his own, until he has first acknowledged, that it is the Lord who gives us all our time, blesses all our labours, who alone can prosper our handy work.

And good men have made this observation in their own private business, that God has been favourable to them, or their ways, according to the conscientious observation of the Lord's Day, or their neglect of it.

And it is worth our notice, that the greatest offenders, when they come to suffer for and are sensible of their crimes, do generally confess, that the neglect and abuse of the Lord's Day was that which first led them into the greatest wickedness: And indeed, how should it be otherways, when it is plain the further we go from God, the greater power the devil gets over us, and the nearer we are to our ruin?

And every person, who has carelessly spent this day, ought to fear, that without repentance some ill may befall him or his affairs the following week.

On the other side, whoever, to the best of his abilities, shall spend the Lord's day in the service of God, and in taking care of his soul, may confidently hope, that things will go better with him for so doing; that the favour of God will attend his honest labours, and be with him, through the following week.

In the second place, we shall find, that the public welfare of the church and state will prosper the better, when this command is conscientiously observed. For to shew that an especial providence watches over the land, when its inhabitants, trusting in God, serve him after his own way, we have this memorable instance written for our example:—The whole nation of the Jews were obliged to go three times a year to Jerusalem, there to worship God. God, who foresaw that worldly-minded men would say in their hearts, that their enemies might come and seize upon their houses and goods in their absence, assures them, that their enemies should not assault them at such times; which promise was made good to them, even to a miracle.

But thirdly, this day was chiefly commanded for the good of our souls.—

If you are sensible of your wants, this is the proper time to lay them before the Throne of Grace; for on this day we meet a number of necessitous creatures like ourselves, wanting instruction, grace, and strength: If we humbly join with these,

and ask in faith, we are sure to be heard, and our petitions will be granted. For this is God's own day, and he makes it honourable by the greater measure of blessings which he bestows upon it.

Have we received any mercy from God, (and do not we live by his mercies?) why, this is the proper time to give HIM thanks, to whom we owe all we have and enjoy.

In a word; this is God's day—of giving pardon to sinners,—of giving grace to the humble,—of giving comfort to the afflicted,—of giving strength to the weak,—of giving blessings to all that call upon him.

What then have they to answer for who make it a day of idleness, a day of drunkenness, a day of doing odd business, of making unnecessary visits, or loitering about, as if it were a curse imposed upon them, to be kept one day in seven from their worldly labour!

But if any person is so much unacquainted with the power and goodness of God, as to think he loses time by serving God, let him but read the xvth chapter of Exodus, where he shall find Almighty God dealing with men, (like ourselves) who were with very great difficulty brought to trust in God:—To convince them of their ignorance, God was pleased to send them, on the evening of the sabbath, twice as much manna as he sent them on other days; both to lead them into an entire dependance upon him, and to be an everlasting instance of his care to those that serve him; and that the time, and the days, which men spend in honouring their Creator, are not lost, whatever worldly men may think.

I know not what I can add more, to lead you into a due regard for this good day, unless I just mention the ill consequences of not observing it according to the command.

Need I tell you, that one of the greatest occasions of that ignorance, which we meet with among Christians, is the neglect of the Lord's day; insomuch that there are too many who know little or nothing of God, of themselves, or of the world to come?

People may have very slow understandings; they may have little time to think of another world; but still they may, nay they would, know what is absolutely necessary to be known, if they did but constantly keep to church on the Lord's day. They would learn to know, that we worship God because we cannot be happy without his blessing; they would learn to know, to whom they ought to be thankful for what they enjoy, because they see people meet at church to give him public thanks for his mercies. Lastly, they would come to understand what a dangerous thing it is to be a sinner, and



at enmity with God, since they see people do not scruple to confess their faults, and to ask pardon for them, even before all men.

In short; if the Lord's day ever comes to be more neglected than it is, (which God in his providence prevent) Christians will grow more ignorant, more careless of themselves, and more wicked than they are at present; and then we may justly expect, that God's judgments will be multiplied, and will be more severe amongst us.

And now, if, by what I have said, I have persuaded you to have reverend thoughts of this good day,—if I have raised in your souls a desire and a resolution of keeping it holy;—let me further instruct you, in a few words, how to do it worthily.

Remember then, to “keep holy the sabbath-day;” first, *by laying aside all worldly business.* That must not be the employment either of your hands or your hearts. The Lord's day has its proper work, which will take up our time, if we resolve to mind it. And therefore, when the prophet requires the observation of the sabbath as a means of preserving the house of Israel, he directs them not to do their *own* work: A work there is to be done, but it is not to be our's, but the service of God. Only thus far it is *our work*, that it is for our good; and if it is called *the Lord's service*, and *serving the Lord*, it is because God is graciously pleased it should be called so, that *he may reward* our service as done to him.

Indeed, the Gospel has freed us from that superstitious observation of this day which the Jews had run into; for works of necessity and charity are to be done on *all* days, because “mercy is better than sacrifice;” that is, *acts of mercy are the best ways of serving God.* But then we must be careful not to call that necessary which is not so; which is the extreme we are run into.

If *servants* are freed on this day from bodily labour, and worldly business, it is that they may know they have a master in Heaven,—a master far greater than any master on earth,—whom they are to serve, to honour, and to pray to; and not that they may be let loose to idleness, and to serve the Devil, as the manner of too many is.

In short; all that own God for their Creator and Preserver, all that own Jesus for their Redeemer, all that expect the assistance of God's good Spirit, to enlighten their minds with saving knowledge, to strengthen them against temptations, to comfort and deliver them in the hour of death and the

day of judgment, will observe this good day religiously: that is, they will be sure to go to God's house, and confess that they altogether depend upon him, both for this world and the next. They will acknowledge their own weakness and sinfulness, and desire his pardon; they will hear his Holy Word, and beg his grace to observe it; and they will give him thanks for the mercies they every day receive at his hands.

And because that it is greatly for God's glory that the number of his servants should increase, all good men will endeavour, as much as may be, to instruct those of their own families in the ways of righteousness; or at least take care that they go where they may be instructed.

To this end, they will breed up their children in a sense of the blessing and sacredness of days of public worship; considering that all people are just what they are bred; for they that are kept strictly to church will be uneasy not to be there, while they that are bred in a profane neglect of holy days never care for the return of such days.

But then, let us have an especial care, that custom does not bring us to observe this good day only by outward and bodily attendance and service: *This people draw nigh to me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me,* was God's complaint against the Jews; and so it will be with us, if we are not careful of our hearts, and do not endeavour to keep them near to God, by considering that he knows the very secrets of our hearts.

And indeed, if people did but set their hearts to serve the Lord, the business of the Lord's day would be a delight, and not a burthen.

The works of the *Creation* may, in some good measure, be seen and thought on with pleasure, even by the meanest person; and the blessing of a *Redemption* is what all are concerned in, and all may know, who do but know that they are sinful helpless creatures. And these are the two proper subjects for our thoughts on these days; and which none are excused from, either on account of business, or for want of knowledge.

And God grant that we may ever esteem it a privilege and a happiness to have a day set apart for his service. May we call it a delight, and truly make it so, that we may at last come to the rest that remaineth for the people of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. To whom, &c.



## S E R M O N LIX.

## THE SIN AND DANGER OF SHUTTING OUR EYES AGAINST THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL.

J O H N iii. 19, 20, 21.

*And this is the Condemnation, that Light is come into the World, and Men loved Darkneſs rather than Light, becauſe their Deeds were evil. For every one that doeth Evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, leſt his Deeds ſhould be reprov'd. But he that doeth Truth cometh to the Light, that his Deeds may be made manifeſt, that they are wrought in God."*

I Will firſt explain to you the meaning of theſe words ; and then you will ſee better how much they concern every one of us : " This is the condemnation, that light " is come into the world ; and men love " darkneſs rather than light, becauſe their " deeds are evil ;" that is, Since God has made known his will and purpoſe to mankind, after ſo plain and kind a manner, by ſending his own Son to teach us how to live ſo as to pleaſe God, and how to eſcape the dreadful reward of ſin in the next world ; if after this we deſpiſe ſo great a mercy, and reſolve to ſhut our eyes againſt that light which would ſhew us the danger we are in, while we continue ignorant of theſe things ; and this purely becauſe we love our ſins, and will not forſake them let what will come of it ;—why then we are to expect no mercy from God, but the ſevereſt ſentence of condemnation.

And every body may know very eaſily, whether this be their caſe :—For, ſaith our Lord, " Every one that doeth evil hateth " the light, neither cometh to the light, " leſt his deeds ſhould be reprov'd ;" that is, Every man may depend upon it, that he is in the way to ruin, who will not take fair warning when it is given him ; who chooſes to be ignorant of what may come hereafter, leſt, being convinced of his folly and danger, he ſhould be forced to reform his life and manners.

On the other hand, our Lord has given men of honeſt minds a proof that they are in the way of life : " He that doeth the " truth cometh to the light, that his deeds " may be made manifeſt, that they are " wrought in God ;" that is, in the fear of God, and according to his will, and the direction of his good Spirit ; which words import thus much :—They that live up-

rightly, and deſire to pleaſe God, are pleaſed with that light which will ſhew them their duty ; which will convince them of any error they are in ; which will diſcover to them the dangers they are ſubject to ; and which will give them the ſatisfaction of knowing for certain, that the way they are in is according to God's will, which therefore will in the end bring them to Heaven.

This is the plain meaning of theſe words of our Lord Chriſt ; and I doubt not but that they are very eaſily underſtood.—The only difficulty will be, to prevail with ourſelves to ſee how far any of us are concerned in them ; that we may be afraid of that dreadful ſentence of condemnation which will be paſſed upon every ſoul of man, who ſhall deſpiſe and hate that light which God in mercy vouchſafes him, to direct him in the way to Heaven and Happineſs. " This is the condemnation, that " light is come into the world, and men " love darkneſs rather than light, becauſe " their deeds are evil."

But what is that light againſt which men ſhut their eyes, and which will therefore be their condemnation ? Why, it is the Light of the Goſpel, communicated unto the world from God, by his beloved Son, and our Saviour Jeſus Chriſt ; by which Goſpel God has made known to us what will become of us when we die ; namely, " They that have done good, ſhall go into " life everlaſting ; and they that have done " evil, into everlaſting fire."

Now ; they that have any manner of ſeriouſneſs will very naturally deſire to know what it is that God expects from them ; how they may attain that everlaſting life and happineſs which God has prepared for them that love him, and obey his laws ; as alſo how they may eſcape the wrath to come.

<sup>a</sup> See Pf. xcvi. 8. Iſa. xxvi. 11. Jer. xi. 21. Matth. v. 14. John xii. 35, 46. Eph. v. 8, 13. 2 Theſſ. ii. 11. 2 Tim. iv. 3.



Why now, Jesus Christ has made all this known to us after the most gracious manner. For instance;—He has made known to us,—that if any man perish, it is from his own wilful obstinacy and blindness;—that God desireth not the *death of a sinner*, but that he should turn from his sin and be saved;—and, because all men are *born in sin and the children of wrath*, he has made known to us, how we may certainly be reconciled to God; what we are to do to please him after he is reconciled to us; as also what dispositions and qualifications are necessary to fit us for heaven.

And because he knows whereof we are made, and that of ourselves we are not able to understand these things so fully as we should do, much less to *do* them, he has therefore made known to us,—that he will, upon certain conditions, give us his Holy Spirit, which shall enable us effectually to know our duty, and to overcome all the temptations and difficulties we can possibly meet with, whether from the *world*, the *flesh*, or the *devil*, which are our mortal enemies, and which, if not resisted, will bring us to destruction both of body and soul.

And that we may know these things the better, he has appointed a certain Order of Men, who, at the peril of their own souls, shall ever and anon be sounding these things in your ears;—shall instruct the ignorant, and reduce them that are out of the way, either by reproof or by godly discipline.

And because men are but too apt to think all that time lost which is not spent on their worldly business, he has appointed one day in seven, which shall be employed chiefly in learning their duty, in praising their Creator, and praying for such things as are *requisite and necessary as well for their bodies as for their souls*. And they that employ this time after this manner, are sure to be no losers by so doing.

This is the *Light and Knowledge* which God has given us: And one would be apt to think, that every soul, who hears of these things, should be much concerned about them, and should argue *thus*, or after some such manner, with himself:—

If these things are true, it concerns me very much to lay them seriously to heart; for if this is the time in which to provide for eternity; if death is ever at hand, and the consequences of a surprize most dreadful; if I am to be for ever happy, or for ever miserable, as I lead my life, and as I end my days here;—if God, *who* only can tell us what will become of us when we die, has expressly declared, that he will call every soul to an account for the works done in

the body, whether they have been good or evil,—that this judgment, and the sentence following, cannot be very far off:—for, (as our Saviour intimates) as the soul of the rich unmerciful man, immediately after death, went to a place of torment; so the soul of Lazarus was, as soon as ever he was dead, carried by the Angels into Paradise, a place of rest and comfort, there to remain until the judgment of the great day; and that thus it must be with every soul when death parts it from the body;—why then, it very much concerns me, (let other people be never so careless) to lay these things to heart;—to provide against the worst that can happen,—to be very earnest to know what I must do to appease and to please God,—what I must do to escape that place of torment which the rich man so dolefully complained of,—and how I may be made partaker of that happiness in Paradise, which the soul of Lazarus enjoys till the resurrection, when his soul and body shall enjoy eternal happiness.

This is what one would be apt to think every Christian, who has heard of these things and pretends to believe them to be true, should reason with himself: But, God knows, this is not the way that the generality of people, the generality of Christians, take;—for, instead of being awakened into a sober fear for themselves; instead of asking that concerning question, *Lord! what must I do to be saved?* that is, how must I live so as to make my life easy and my death happy?—Instead of this, they take the sure way to be for ever undone:—They *bate*, and they *avoid*, that *Light* which would shew them their mistake and their danger. “They say unto God,” (as those heretofore did) “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways;” or, as those which Isaiah complains of, “who say to the Seers, see not; and to the Prophets, prophesy not unto us right things; speak unto us smooth things; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us;” that is, do not speak to us of God and his Word; we had rather not hear these things; they make us uneasy; while we do not know them, we do not fear them; and while we do not fear them, we are easy; we see plainly, that if we give way to the belief of these things, we must lead another sort of life; we must part, every man, with his most beloved sins, which we *cannot* yet think of doing; we will therefore choose to continue in darkness; we had rather continue ignorant, and enjoy the pleasures we do, than part with them, or be tormented with the knowledge of what will follow, if we do not part with them.

° Job xxi. 14.

P Chap. xxx. 10.



I know very well, what every one that hears me, and understands, and minds what I have said, thinks of this way of reasoning.

What! people that are bred and born amongst Christians; people that every day profess to believe a judgment and life to come, rewards and punishments of another world; is it possible for Christians to speak, or to think at this wild rate? People who have the light of the Gospel to guide them, and the Ministers of the Gospel to instruct them, can *they* be said to be still in darkness? Can they be said to hate *that light* which God has sent *to guide their feet into the way of peace?*

Why now, Christians, I will set before you matter of fact; and you will see that it is as true at this day, as it was when our Saviour spoke these words; and that, altho' *light*, the light of the Gospel, *has been so long in the world*, "yet men" (the generality of men) "love darkness rather than light." And, for the very same reason, even "because their deeds are evil," they will not bear to be reprov'd; they will not bear to be disturb'd; they will not lay these things to heart.

And *first*; as our Blessed Lord observed then, that "the Scribes and the Pharisees" "rejected the counsel of God,"—his gracious designs of mercy to bring them to Christ by the Baptism of John; even so it is now. Infinite is the number of those, who, though the glad tidings of the Gospel are held forth to them, will not vouchsafe to hearken to them, because they are too wise to be taught by God himself.

But, *secondly*, this is not the worst of our case: There are many, very many, who set themselves to oppose this light with all their might;—who deny the Lord that bought them; deny, or, which is worse, despise all his gracious offers of *pardon*, of *reconciliation*, of *assistance*, and of *happiness*.

*Thirdly*, there are others, and perhaps they are most in number, who dare not go so far as to deny the Lord Jesus, and the Gospel he has given us, who yet *do hold the truth in unrighteousness*, do lead as careless and ungodly lives as the greatest infidels.

*Lastly*, there are but too many, and in the very throng of Christians, who are utter strangers to the very design of Christianity; who know not why they are baptized; why they were obliged to renounce the Devil, to believe in God, and to serve him: who are altogether unconcerned how to please God while they live, and know not what will become of them when they die.

All this is matter of fact. It is an astonishing infatuation, that men should not care

for, should *avoid*, should *bate*, that Light which would shew them their folly and their danger: But so it is; and our Lord has given us the true reason: "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be re-proved;" that is, lest he should see his error, be convinced of his danger, and be obliged to part with his beloved sins: And this is the true reason, let whatever else be pretended, of all that *infidelity*, *ignorance of divine things*, *profaneness*, and *stupid carelessness*, which we meet with, which way soever we turn us.

Some therefore choose to be infidels, concluding, one may suppose, that if they do not believe the terrors of the world to come, they have no reason to fear them; that, therefore, they may go on in the ways of their own choosing without disturbance.

To such perverse reasoning, one would oppose what St. Paul saith to Timothy: "If we believe not, yet God abideth faithful; he cannot deny himself:" that is, if God has decreed "that every one that believeth not, shall be damned," this will be so in the conclusion, though all the world should agree *not to believe one word of it*.

Others there are, who believe, who see the light, but hate the sight of it, because it shews them their error and their danger. The consequence of which will certainly be what St. Paul has set down;<sup>a</sup> "Whereas they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind:" Enough, one would think, to startle the most resolved sinner,—to be abandoned of God and left to himself!

Nor are they in a much better condition, who hope, that their being in darkness, their want of knowledge, will excuse their following their own ways, and living in sin. Want of knowledge, in a Christian country! where the church doors are open one day in seven,—where the Gospel is, or may be, in every body's hands,—where the great truths and duties of religion are made plain to the meanest capacities, and fitted for the shortest memories!

In short; *none are so blind as they that will not see*. And this is, in truth, the case of all such as are engaged in sinful courses or infidelity: They shut their eyes and complain that they want light; and at the same time *they are*, "as those that rebel against the light," of whom Job speaks, "the morning being to them even as the shadow of death." And therefore, *they hate Jesus Christ, because he hath brought Life and Immortality to light through the Gospel*;—They hate that Gospel, because it holds forth a

<sup>a</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 13.<sup>a</sup> Rom. i. 28.<sup>a</sup> Job. xxiv. 13. 17. standing



standing light which shews them to themselves;—they hate Christ's Ministers, because they are, or should be, ever sounding these, and such like truths in their ears: "Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord:" "Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor thieves, nor drunkards, nor covetous, &c. shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

It is for this reason, that, as the Prophet Amos, chap. v. 10. speaks, "They hate him that rebuketh in the gate;" that is, the conscientious civil magistrate, who punishes vice; "and they abhor him that speaketh uprightly;" that is, the priest, who tells them the plain truth.

In one word; they that are engaged in wickedness of any kind will have an aversion to every thing that belongs to God; his *House*, his *Day*, his *Word*, his *Ministers*, and his *Ordinances*; and by this they themselves may know, that they are in darkness, and in the way of perdition.

Now; the things which I would recommend to your consideration, from these words of Christ, are these following:—

And *first*; it is plain from hence, *that if men have no Religion, it is because they will have none*: It is not for want of light to shew them the way they should go; but because they are resolved not to part with their sins, they avoid that light which would shew them their folly and their danger. And let such people complain never so much, that they want to be convinced of the truths of Christianity, and of that holiness which it requires, and the happiness which it proposes; they will still continue in darkness, and will die without faith, and without hopes of mercy; for *faith being the gift of God*, he expects, that they that want it should ask it, and after such a manner as to shew they value it; that they should prepare themselves for receiving it, by parting with those sins which they know to be displeasing to God, from whom they ask this favour. When they do this, they will believe the Gospel, and be convinced, how much it concerns them to obey its laws: but whoever is afraid of seeing the truth, has no reason to expect that God will shew it him.

*Secondly*; As for such as *do* believe the Gospel, *but hold the truth in unrighteousness*; that is, who believe as they should do, but lead careless or ungodly lives, such would do well to consider, that every man who lives in any known sin is advancing towards atheism; that is, to a state which will oblige him, first to *wish*, and then to *say there is no God*.—

Christians will not believe this, or that God will ever deprive them of that measure of light and knowledge which he has vouchsafed them; and yet it is as certain as any truth in the Gospel, that he who lives not up to that measure of grace which God has given him, even *that which he hath shall be taken away*. If men will not retain God in their knowledge, and live like men that know God, *God will give them up to a reprobate mind*; that is, to a mind void of judgment; so that they shall commit all iniquity with greediness, as a most righteous punishment for making so ill use of the grace of God, and the light he had given them.

In the next place; they that hope to make their lives easy, by continuing in darkness, and by shutting their eyes against the light, do not consider, that that very darkness will make them uneasy. No man ever found perfect satisfaction either in ignorance or infidelity. *Doubts* and *fears* of what may come hereafter, are the certain consequence of sin, of ignorance, and of unbelief.

*Fourthly*; They that are uneasy or unwilling to hear their duty, or to have their miscarriages reprov'd, may depend upon it, that they are in a bad way, a way which will lead them to their ruin. The case being with them as it is with those that have bad eyes, the light makes them uneasy, and they choose to be in the dark, and want all that comfort and advantage, which others enjoy; and, which is worst of all, they know not what this blindness will end in.

This being the case of all such as are careless hearers of God's word; negligent in coming to his house; despisers of his Ministers, and treating them as their enemies; uneasy at the reproof of their friends; angry with those that shew them their faults; never pray for God's grace and Spirit to enlighten their minds with saving truth; stifle the voice of their own consciences, and the remains of that light which God has given them in earnest of a better, if they would make use of that:—All these love darkness better than the light, and are liable to that sentence of condemnation, which will send them to remediless ruin and misery.

But then, in the next place, is it not a strange blindness that has seized the hearts of Christians, who pretend to pity those poor Heathens that want the light of the Gospel, and yet make so little use of it themselves? How glad would a serious Heathen be to know, how he might be freed from the guilt of the sins he has committed;—how he may overcome that corruption of his nature which leads him to sin continually! How thankful would he be to



to be certainly informed of what becomes of men when they die:—Whether they shall be accountable for what they have done here? Whether there be rewards and punishments in another life, and how these may be escaped, and those attained?

Why now, good Christians, every one of you do, or may, know these things, and be as well assured of them, as that you live; and yet, how few value the blessing of knowing them, and still fewer that make any use of this knowledge! Can there be any blindness equal to this? You thank God you are a Christian, and that you believe the Gospel: What! and yet live as if every word of it were false!

People do not consider, that to *believe the Gospel*, is to be convinced—of the certainty of the rewards and punishments of the life to come,—of the absolute necessity of *holiness*, in order to escape eternal misery, and to attain eternal happiness;—it is to be convinced, that nothing in this world ought to tempt us to displease God, by breaking any one of his commands; for what can a man choose in exchange for his soul?

It is to be convinced, that we are in real danger; and that we ought to be always on our guard; for, that we have many enemies to deal with; a powerful evil spirit, a bewitching world, and a corrupt heart.

It is to be convinced of the necessity of making use of all those means of salvation which are prescribed in the Gospel; such are, reading or hearing the Word of God with concern; praying to God continually for light to know, and power to do what will please him.

Say you are convinced of these things, and are resolved by God's help, to live as if you did in truth believe them; and then you will have reason to thank God that you are a Christian, *and to praise Him who has called you out of darkness unto his marvellous light.*

But alas! the lives men generally lead will not suffer us to believe, that they are thus convinced of the truths of the Gospel; this gives all serious Christians both shame and grief.—But to proceed.

*Sixthly*; These words of our Lord afford matter of direction and comfort to all such who love and fear God, and desire to do such things as may please him. For finding themselves always willing to *bear*, and to *learn*, and to *know* his will and pleasure, they conclude with good reason, and with satisfaction, that their lives are such as they should be, because they will abide to be examined by the light.

But then, even these should consider, that there is still a danger of miscarrying, of quenching that light which God has given them, and of returning into a state of darkness;—of becoming again slaves to those lusts which darken the soul, grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and lead to outer darkness, where there is nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth.

*Lastly*; let us all, that have any concern for eternity, take the direction of the Prophet; “To give glory to the Lord our God,” by living as becomes his servants, “before he cause darkness, and before our feet stumble upon the dark mountains; and while we look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death,” *before the night cometh, when no man can work.* Eternity is a matter of too great concern to be neglected, or put off to the last.

To be for ever happy, or for ever miserable, will be the certain portion of every man, who has made use of, or turned his back upon, that light which God has afforded him to bring him to everlasting life.

God grant that we may all think of this, that we may walk as children of the light; and that the prince and powers of darkness may have no share in us; but that we may attain the light of everlasting life. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Jerem. xiii. 16.



## S E R M O N LX.

ASH-WEDNESDAY.

## THE GREAT INDIGNATION OF GOD AGAINST SINNERS.

D E U T. XXIX. 18, 19, 20.

*Left there should be among you man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God, to go and serve the Gods of these Nations: lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; and it come to pass, when he heareth the Words of this Curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have Peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart to add drunkenness to thirst. The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the Curses that are written in this Book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under Heaven."*

HERE is one of the most solemn and dreadful declarations of God's displeasure, that, perhaps, is to be met with in the whole Book of God. Let us consider the occasion:—

In the chapter going before, Moses had very particularly set before the people of Israel *the blessings of obedience to the laws of God, and the curses which would certainly follow their disobedience.* And that they might be more careful, and afraid of drawing down those curses upon their heads, the Levites were commanded, in the audience of all the people, "to say with a loud voice, Cursed be the man that is guilty of idolatry,—of undutifulness to his parents,—of removing his neighbour's land-mark,—of making the blind to go out of his way,—that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, &c. And all the people shall say *"Amen;"* acknowledging the righteousness of the laws of God, and confessing that a curse is due to those that wilfully break them.

And all this was done to the intent, that, being admonished of the great indignation of God against sinners, they might flee from such vices, for which they did, with their own mouths, affirm *the curse of God to be due.*

But lest, after this solemn declaration, there should be any so perverse as to slight these curses, and hope to escape the judgments of God, though they do the things here forbidden; therefore Almighty God does, in the words of the text, most solemnly declare, "That if any man, when

"he heareth the words of this curse, shall  
"bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall  
"have peace," that is, no evil shall befall me, "though I walk in the imagination" or stubbornness "of mine heart, and add  
"one sin to another: The Lord will not  
"spare such a man, but his anger and his  
"jealousy shall smoke against that man, and  
"all the curses that are written in this book  
"shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall  
"blot out his name from under Heaven."

So that the persons who are here so severely threatened are such as hear the things which God has forbidden upon pain of his displeasure, and instead of saying *Amen* to his righteous sentence, (that is, acknowledging that they who do such things are worthy of death) not only do the same, but flatter themselves in their wickedness, and fear not the judgments of God, and so become incurably wicked. For if the *wrath* and *fear* of Almighty God will not restrain men, no other consideration can keep them from destruction.

Thus you see how mercifully God provided for his own people,—to keep them in awe,—to keep his laws fresh in their memories,—to plant his fear in their hearts. They were bound to hear the curses due to those that should offend;—they were obliged to give their assent to every part of the law, *that it was holy, just, and good;* and that the transgressors of it deserved the wrath of God;—and they are most solemnly assured, that such as should refuse to give *this testimony* to the Truth of God, and the Righteousness of his Laws, by saying *Amen* to

\* See Josh. viii. 33. Ps. cxix. 21. Prov. i. 24. Rom. ii. 8. iii. 20. v. 20. vii. 13. Gal. iii. 13.



them, that man should be exposed to the vengeance of an angry God.

But this *command* and *service*, you will say, was given to the Jews, who were under the Law; and what is this to us? Why, I will tell you:—We have the *same principles*, the *same seeds of disobedience* in our nature, and we are as liable and as apt to forget our duty and our God as *ever the Jews were*; and we are as sure to be punished, if we offend presumptuously, as ever they were; and consequently, we have as much need to have the curses of God against notorious sinners set before us as ever the Jews had.

Having said thus much to shew *why our Church retains this service*, I now proceed to the words of the text, which naturally offer these following observations:—

*First*; That men are but too apt to turn away from God, to *set up idols in their hearts*, to speak peace unto and govern themselves, not according to *God's laws*, but according to their *own imaginations*.

*Secondly*; That therefore God has, from the beginning, published all his laws with a *curse* or *penalty* upon offenders, that they may be *afraid* of bringing destruction upon themselves.

*Thirdly*; That such as do turn their ears from hearing the law, and its curses, do reject the counsel of God, provoke him to wrath, and take the sure way to ruin.

I. And first; *Men are very apt to turn away from God, to set up their own imaginations to govern and judge themselves by; and so speak peace to themselves without either reason or Scripture.*

And indeed thus it has been with men ever since our *first parents*, who, forsaking the commands of God, would needs be *wiser than their Maker*; and by their *infidelity* and *disobedience* lost that happiness which their posterity have ever since been striving to regain; and generally without success, because they hope for happiness by ways of their own devising. *For it is utterly impossible that a man in a state of corruption should recover himself, who, in a state of innocence, could not preserve himself from falling.* And though God in mercy has contrived a way for our redemption from this miserable bondage, and would most assuredly bring us back to himself, would we be but governed by him; yet, such is our perverseness, we think *his ways are grievous*, and try a thousand ways of going to Heaven, without being obliged to part with our beloved sins.

For instance:—There are an infinite number of people, who have very little sense of religion, who were never awakened with

the guilt of their sins, or the wrath of an angry God; who have no token of their *obedience* or *repentance* to shew, and yet *hope* to be happy; and *that* is all they have for it. Gracious God! that creatures liable to eternal misery should not be more concerned to know how to avoid it!

Another delusion is, *that* of *those* who fancy that God will not be so severe as he has threatened; not considering what the Apostle saith to such foolish imaginations: “If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself;”<sup>w</sup> that is, let men believe what they please, and depend upon their own fancies, God will judge them according to his word; and those that have done wickedly, and have not repented, shall have eternal torments for their portion, *whether they believe this or not.*

There are likewise people who imagine, that, because they do not pretend to be very strict in their lives, therefore they are not bound to be so. A Clergyman, who teacheth others, they think, should be very careful to keep God's commands; but for other people, they hope an allowance will be made, and so an allowance they take; never laying *this truth* to heart, that “without holiness, no man” *whatever* “shall see the Lord.” And indeed, it is not because a clergyman teacheth others, that he is bound to be *sober*, and *chaste*, and *just*, and *charitable*; but it is because neither he, nor any body else, *can* go to Heaven without these qualifications.

Again:—Some people hope, because they are not so wicked as others, that therefore they are in no danger. They do not enquire whether they are such as God commands them to be; but only whether they are not as bad as it is possible for them to be.

There are also many who will tell you, that however wicked they have been, they are not so now. Such people would do well to consider, that he who was once a *murderer*, or an *adulterer*, will always be such; and that no *murderer*, or *adulterer*, can enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but by *faith* and *repentance*, which require something more than barely forsaking of sin.

It is likewise but too plain, that many people, if they can but hide their crimes from men, are no farther concerned. They are not willing to remember, that God undoubtedly sees their ways, and knows the very secrets of their hearts; that he is one day to be their judge; and that he “can destroy both body and soul in hell.”

Farther:—If a man has but some good qualities, he is apt to hope that this will bear him out, though he is engaged in a

<sup>w</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 13.



sinful course of life. The Spirit of God, by St. James,\* faith the direct contrary. But if people are resolved to follow their inclinations, they will not mind what God faith, though they are sure to be ruined.

Lastly; it is not possible to say how many perish by consenting to known iniquity, in hopes of having an opportunity of repenting before they die; knowing at the same time, that if they should die without repentance, they are sure to be undone for ever.

Now *these*, and such as *these*, are the idols in men's hearts. And they are called *idols*, because they are *vanity* and *nothing*; that is, they are not able to deliver those that put their trust in them from the wrath of God. And yet they are trusted to as if they could. And therefore God, who knows all these secret delusions of the heart, and knows also that nothing but *fear* and *dread* can keep men from taking shelter under these *idols* of their own making,—

II. God, I say, has therefore from the beginning published all his Laws with a curse or penalty upon offenders; that men may be afraid of the anger of God, and beware of provoking his jealousy, by doing the things which he has so strictly forbidden. Which was the second particular that we proposed to consider.

One may observe a strange unwillingness in people to hear the *curse* or *penalties* of the law of God against impenitent sinners. The meaning of this is, we desire to follow our own ways without disturbance; for the Law was given that sin might abound; that is, that sin might appear in its true colours; and that men, seeing the *curse* due to it, might be afraid of coming near it; but instead of doing this, they are not willing so much as to bear that a *curse* attends it.

It is true, the Law is *terrible*, and the anger of God, and his *curse* against offenders, are indeed *dreadful*; and yet all little enough to keep those that hear them from transgressing his laws. What a world then should we have, if every one might do *what was right in his own eyes*, without fear of what will follow!

But God has consulted better for his creatures; for he has given us a rule to walk by, and he has plainly told us what we must certainly expect, if we refuse to observe it. By this we come to the knowledge of ourselves, and the wretched condition we are in. In this Law, as in a glass, every man may see what he is by nature, and what every man would be, did not the grace of God hinder him. For God has laid his *curse* upon all that break his laws,

\* Chap. ii. 10.

which all are subject to do, that all may take warning, and “flee from the wrath to come.” That such as are asleep in sinful pleasures, that such as are dead in trespasses and sins, may, by the sound of the vengeance of God, be awakened and raised to a life of righteousness.

But “the Law” (the Apostle tells us) “is not made for the righteous, but for the lawless and disobedient.” And who, pray, is not so by nature? Let him that is without sin make this objection; let him that does not find in himself the seeds of wickedness, let such a one, if he pleaseth, refuse to hear the curses of the law.

I know people are apt to fancy, that it is impossible for *them* ever to be what they see and hear of others, *murderers, idolaters, adulterers*, and the like: But pray from what parents did these people spring? The Psalmist professeth of himself, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” And most certainly we are all of the very same race;—a seed of evil doers, capable of and prone to every sin, to which the law of God has joined a curse.

But as the Law shews us what we are by nature, so does it shew us what we do deserve, and what will be our portion, if we do not repent and turn to God, forsaking every evil way. “Every curse that is written in this book shall fall upon him,” faith the Lord. See the effect this consideration had upon David himself: “There is no soundness in my flesh, because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones, because of my sin: for mine iniquities are gone over mine head; as an heavy burthen, they are too heavy for me.” And verily, whoever has not felt some such pangs of affliction as these in his soul, has reason to fear that he is still under the curse of the Law.

But this is not all that God designed by setting the Law and his Judgments before us. “My Son,” faith Joshua to Achan, “give glory to God, and tell me what thou hast done.” And this is another effect the fear of God will have upon true penitents. They will give glory to God; will acknowledge, that *He* can bring to light the hidden works of darkness,—that *he* can humble the proudest sinner, and soften the hardest heart,—that the terror of his wrath, and heavy displeasure, are only able to awaken and convert a sinner, when all other arguments have been made use of to little purpose.

Thus it was with the Psalmist, when the terrors of God had made him sensible of his miscarriage: “I acknowledge my  
1 Tim. i. 9. 2 Ps. li. 5. 3 Ps. xxxviii. 3. 4 Josh. vii. 19.  
 “sin



“fin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord.” And thus indeed it will be with every true penitent, who considers, that whether he *hides* or *confesseth* his sin *now*, the day will come, when the most secret sins must come to light.

And when he seriously considers this, the *Law of God*, and the *dread of his judgments*, will have another blessed effect upon him. For it will make him *loath* and *abhor* himself; and he will say, in the words of Ezra, “I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face unto Thee, my God, for mine iniquities are increased over my head, and my trespass is grown up unto Heaven.” And in *this temper of soul*, we shall not need to be *advised*, or *compelled* to acts of humiliation; but we shall *fast* and *pray*, and deny ourselves the pleasures of life, as willingly as before we indulged them.

And now, being thus affected, we may be truly said, in the words of St. Luke, to be “disposed for eternal life.” For, “to them that thus fear God,” (saith the Prophet) “shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” And this is the *last* and *great* end of the law, to bring us unto Christ, who is ordained of God to be the *Saviour of the World*; that, believing in him, we may receive *remission of sins*; which, though the Law could not give us, yet by its terrors, it forced us (through the favour of God) to look out for help to one who is “mighty to save.”

III. So that *such as do turn their ears from hearing the Law and its Curses, do reject the counsel of God for their good, and take the sure way to ruin.* Which was the last particular we proposed to consider.

It is not for nothing that the Spirit of God has so often told us, that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” But how shall *they* fear God, who know nothing of his judgments, and who will not hear what he has determined against presumptuous sinners?

People may fancy, That good advice might do all this;—that by a due execution of the laws, (and especially if the antient Church Discipline were revived) men would be forced to fear God;—that good examples would recommend piety;—and that if a little more care were taken in the education of children, they would naturally fear God, and walk in his ways.

Now, it is certain, all these are excellent helps to piety; but unless the fear of God and the dread of his judgments possess the heart, these will do no more but only restrain

\* Pf. xxxii. 5. \* Ezra ix. 6. \* Acts xiii. 48. \* Mal. iv. 2.

the *outward man*. For—how many are there who observe an outward decency, and yet live securely in most damnable sins!—How many have had good examples, and a Christian education, and after all break loose, and become profligately wicked!—How many submit to public penance, without being bettered by it, or suffering it to touch their hearts!—How long may one talk to a carnal man of the inconveniencies of living in sin, of the prejudice he does his *health*, his *reputation*, his *estate*, and his *family*!—How much for his *advantage* it would be, and *praise-worthy*, to live like a Christian!—And all this without any other effect than making him live more cautiously for the time to come.

Alas! these are all but weak arguments to *awaken* a man that is in a sleep of deep security; to raise one *from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness*. No less a voice than that which spoke in thunder from Mount Sinai, can possibly startle a soul accustomed to and in love with wickedness.

But perhaps you will think the Gospel is a milder dispensation, and that it has no need of these terrors to persuade and convert its hearers: But you will find the quite contrary when you consult it seriously. “Go, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels;—where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth;—where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.” These are the words of the merciful Saviour of the world.

And if the mild, the compassionate Jesus was forced to use such language to oblige his followers “to work out their salvation with fear and trembling,” we may be very sure no milder arguments will serve to awaken and convert men; and that such as despise these arguments are incurable by any other method.

Whoever, therefore, has any concern for his soul, and is not already converted, would do well to think of these things;—and that he may consider them to better purpose, I would recommend these few points to his most *serious thoughts*:—

*First*; That it is to no purpose to complain of the corruption of our nature,—of the multitude of evil examples,—of the power of temptations,—and the difficulties of a Christian life;—and, at the same time, to shun that very way which God has directed us to take in order to overcome all these difficulties; which, as you have heard, nothing but the fear of God and his grace can do, which is bestowed on *them only* that fear him. If therefore you are in good earnest, and would get out of the *snare of the Devil*,



*Devil*, hear what the law saith to those that break it;—hearken to the curses it pronounces against presumptuous sinners;—*own the justice of them*;—pray God to set these things home upon your heart;—and, depend upon it, the fear of God can enable you to overcome all the difficulties you complain of, or can meet with.

*Secondly*; Let us always remember, that the curse will come, whether we say *Amen* or not; and that *fornicators*, and *adulterers*, and *drunkards*, and *thieves*, with all others who presumptuously break the laws of God, will be shut out of the kingdom of Heaven, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear to hear.

In the *third* place; Let none think themselves so far advanced as not to need the terrors of the Law to keep them awake, for self-confidence and security have undone very many; and, generally speaking, those that *fear least* have *most reason* to *fear*. And even the best of Christians will find *this advantage* in hearing the law, and the curses due to the transgressors of it; they will be humbled with the remembrance of their past offences; they will be more thankful for their deliverance from the curse of the law; and more affectionately adore the Lord that redeemed them from so great a death. And such have a particular promise of the favour of God:—"To this man will I look," saith the Lord, "even to him that is poor and of a contrite heart, and that trembleth at my word;" that is, who feareth *him*, and trembleth at *his* word, "who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell."

What remains then, but that, "*knowing* the terror of the Lord," every one of us

<sup>a</sup> If. lvi. 2.

in particular seriously consider, wherein we have broken any of those laws which the Spirit of God assures us will keep us out of Heaven; that we take the Apostle's advice, and "judge ourselves, that we may not be judged" and punished "by God;" which is the only way to escape, when once we have transgressed his laws.

And for such as have not yet fallen into any of those sins against which the curse of God is threatened, let them bless God, by whose grace they have been prevented;—let them see their own frailty in the fall of others;—and, setting before their eyes the curse they are liable to, if they ever be so unhappy as to deserve it by their sins, let them "watch and pray, that they enter not into temptation;" remembering the words of Solomon, "Happy is the man that feareth always;" as also those of the Apostle, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

And does not the church offer us all, at this time, a RARE OPPORTUNITY of improving these considerations? Does she not set before us the curses of God against impenitent sinners? Does she not require us to hear them, and to acknowledge with our own mouths, "that they which do such things are worthy of death?" for that is the meaning of saying *Amen* to them. Does she not by this service PUT US IN REMEMBRANCE WHEREIN WE HAVE OFFENDED? Does she not by the same service give us fair warning WHAT WILL FOLLOW, if we rebel against God? And can any man, who desires or who pretends to fear God, turn his back on God's own institution? We do therefore testify against all such, that they neither FEAR GOD, nor sincerely desire to KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 31.

## S E R M O N LXI.

OF CHRIST'S SECOND COMING TO JUDGE THE WORLD.

R E V. xxii. 12.

*And behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be.<sup>1</sup>*

WE BELIEVE THAT THOU SHALT COME TO BE OUR JUDGE. This is what we say every day with our lips; but, O *Jesu*! how little do we lay to heart what this means! And yet there is no doctrine in Holy Scripture more *clear*, none more cer-

tain, none more *awakening*. If there will be a *Day of Judgment*, there will be a *Sentence*; if a *sentence*, that sentence must be righteous and just; if a righteous sentence is to pass upon every man, and upon every work of man; if "God will then bring

<sup>1</sup> See Matth. xvi. 27. John v. 22, 23. Acts. i. 19. x. 42. xvii. 31. 2 Cor. v. 10.



"every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil;"<sup>k</sup> if he will then "give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruits of his doings;"<sup>l</sup> if he will *then* say to the *righteous*, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, ye shall go into life eternal;" and to the *wicked*, "ye shall go into everlasting punishment;" (all which God has expressly declared *shall* come to pass;) it very much concerns Christians to consider seriously, how it is like to go with them at *that great day*.

And yet such is our unthoughtfulness, we live as if not one word of this were true, as if it would never come to pass. But as sure as Jesus Christ once came to forewarn us of these things, so sure will he come again to call all men to an account, how they have lived under the light of his Gospel, and what use they have made of his favours.

Our Lord's first *Advent*, that is, *his coming in the flesh*, (for that is the meaning of the word *Advent*) his *first coming* was—to recover mankind out of the snare of the Devil,—to restore them to the favour of God, which they had lost,—to put them into a condition of attaining eternal happiness,—to give them such laws and rules as should certainly bring them to Heaven if they would be governed by them. "I came not," saith he, "to condemn the world, but to save the world."

But his *second coming* will be, to take an account how men have improved under these advantages, and accordingly to pass judgment upon them. This he has given us to understand by the similitude of a man travelling into a far country, who, calling his servants, gave every one talents according to their abilities, and at his return called them all to an account. Such as had been careful and diligent according to their power, he rewarded much above what they deserved or expected, and such as had either despised his authority or had been careless of their duty, he punished most severely.<sup>m</sup>

From which it appears, that at present we are in a *state of trial*; that we may be for ever happy, if it is not our own fault; and that we *shall* be for ever miserable, if we neglect this *day of grace*; for when the time of trial, which God shall have made of all men, is over, then cometh the judgment; by which judgment our Lord Christ assures us, "the wicked shall go into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal."<sup>n</sup>

So that if *any thing*, either the fear of Hell-torments, or the hopes of Heaven and Happiness, will make people serious and

concerned for their souls' eternal welfare, there can be no subject more proper to awaken us, than this of Christ's *second coming* mentioned in the text: "Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his works shall be;" that is, as St. Paul expresses it, "To them, who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honour, and immortality, Eternal Life; but unto them that do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good."<sup>o</sup>

So that you see, Christians, here is a subject of the *greatest terror*, and the *greatest comfort*;—*terror* to such as live in sin, and know not how soon death and judgment may overtake them;—but *comfort* to all such as are working out their salvation with *fear and trembling*; that is, with a concern suitable to the value of their souls, and the account they are to give.

I hope you do not expect I should go about to prove these things; *That there will be a Day of Judgment*; and that good men will then be made happy, and wicked men miserable;—it is enough, sure, if I shew you, that the SON OF GOD HIMSELF has declared this, in words as plain as can be expressed: "Behold," saith he, "I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be."

And in the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew, he himself tells us plainly how he will proceed in that great day; that before him shall be gathered all nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd separateth his sheep from the goats; and that having convinced the one of their good deeds, and the other of their evil deeds, "they that have done good shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil into everlasting fire."—So that thus it *must* be, God having declared it, whether people think of it or not, and though too many never lay these things to heart.

But you will wonder, perhaps, that of so many Christians who profess to believe a judgment and life to come, so few are seriously concerned to provide against that great day. I will shew you the reason, and you will be satisfied it is the *true reason*.

When a man is over head and ears in debt, you cannot speak to him upon a more unwelcome subject *than that of settling his accounts*; he had rather think of any thing

<sup>k</sup> Ecclef. xii. 14.  
<sup>m</sup> Matth. xxv.

<sup>l</sup> Jer. xxxii. 19.  
<sup>n</sup> Matth. xxv. 46.

<sup>o</sup> Rom. ii. 6.



than of his debts, and of what may be the end of them.

Just thus it is with the generality of Christians:—They know very well that they do not live like men who must one day give an account of all their actions, and therefore they do not care of all things to think of *that day*;—they hate the very thoughts of it, as some wretched people have done, who, when they have been under the sentence of death, have made themselves drunk, to keep off the *thoughts of death*; not that they hoped thereby to escape death, but to be easy for the present.

And is not this the *true reason* that most people strive to be in a hurry of business, or pleasures, that they may not think of themselves, or of what may become of them when they die? Yes, *most certainly*.

But then Christians should seriously consider, that the decrees of God will *stand firm*, though they never think of them; and that God “will give to every man according to his ways, and according to the ‘fruit of his doings,’ though all the world should resolve not to lay to heart the dreadful consequence of the judgment of that great day; or, which is as foolish, to put off the thought thereof till it is too late to prepare for it.

But that we may not do so, let us remember what our Lord said of the *rich man* and *Lazarus*,—that the soul of the first went directly to a place of misery, as soon as ever it was parted from the body; and that the soul of poor Lazarus was carried by the Angels into Paradise, called Abraham's bosom:—So that you see, Christians, it is not very long before we shall, *every soul of us*, be in a state of happiness or misery, there to remain until the *Day of Judgment*, even as soon as ever death parts our souls from our bodies. After that, “the night cometh, when no man can work.”—“There is no repentance in the grave:”—This life is the *DAY OF GRACE, the time of trial*:—If we live as we should do, during the time God affords us in which to work out our salvation, we are sure to be happy for ever; and if we live in sin, and die without being converted, we are sure to be miserable for ever and ever.

What is it then that people flatter themselves with? Is it with hopes that God will be more merciful to them than he has declared in his word;—or is it because they hope to come off as well as others;—or is it because they do not firmly believe a judgment to come?—Lord help us! that Christians should so easily deceive themselves to their own ruin!

Suppose people will shut their eyes, and harden their hearts, and will not believe the terrors of the world to come, till they sadly feel them; what do they get by this?—Will their unbelief make the truth of God of none effect? Will God change his word, and his purposes, and stop his judgments, because sinners do not believe, or do not mind his threatenings?

But they hope God will be merciful to them, after all; and these hopes are apt to make them less fearful of offending, and less careful of their ways.

Pray let us consider how far God has declared *that his mercy shall reach*.

He knows whereof we are made, and that we have made ourselves liable to his anger;—in great mercy, therefore, he sent his own Son to redeem us.

He knows we are weak, and that we have many enemies and temptations to struggle with;—in great mercy, therefore, he offers grace and assistance to all such as earnestly pray for it.

He knows that we are ignorant, and his mercy has given us a rule and a law to walk by;—and when we have broke this law, (as we are but too apt to do) he will in mercy accept of our sincere repentance.

Besides all this, his mercy has provided *a reward of everlasting life* for all such as strive to obey him sincerely, though they should fail in many things.

Now, these are all instances of God's great goodness to sinful men. But then there are persons to whom God has declared *that he will not shew any mercy or favour*:—even to all such as, having these mercies proposed to them, do yet despise them, who live in sin, and die without repentance and without bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.

Hear what St. Paul saith: “Be not deceived,” (that is, do not hope for God's mercy while you go on to break his commandments;) “for neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God.”—So that you see, Christians, we must not depend upon mercy but upon the terms of the Gospel, which are, *faith* and *repentance*, and doing works answerable to amendment of life.

And let us not fancy that God cannot be angry, and severely too, with sinners. He has given us instances that he *can* and *will* be so, against such as despise his long-suf-



fering, and goodness, which ought to lead us to repentance. He destroyed the whole world, except eight persons, for their wickedness. He destroyed Sodom with fire and brimstone. He cast off his own people, the Jews, and dispersed them through the world, to be a standing example to mankind, not to provoke the goodness of God at their peril, nor to expect his pardon and favour without striving to deserve them.

But then people are apt to comfort themselves with these thoughts:—It will not be worse with me than with the rest of the world. *Poor comfort*, God knows; and yet, it is to be feared, too many support their spirits with this delusion, and think they need not be more afraid of what may come hereafter, than every body about them. And yet, *in this world*, nobody cares to be miserable for company, or *undone* because some desperate people do not care what becomes of them.

All serious people will be wiser than so, and will be awakened by the terrors of our Lord's *second coming*, to lay hold of the mercy offered them in his *first coming*, which was *to call men to repentance and amendment of life*; that, when our Lord comes again to judge the world in righteousness, (that is, in *justice*) we may be found in the number of those who shall be thought worthy to escape that frightful sentence:—"Go, ye *curfed*, into everlasting fire."

Now this should oblige us *all to two duties* especially;—First, *To repent us truly of all our sins past*; and secondly, *To be very careful of our thoughts, words, and actions, for the time to come*.

By a *timely repentance* we shall be restored to God's favour; and by a *wary* and a *sober life*, for the time to come, we shall have the comfort of being assured that our repentance was sincere.

Whoever is not prevailed on to take this method *must, all his life long, be subject to bondage*; he cannot but be afraid of *death*, and of that *judgment* which must follow.

And this all Christians are so well satisfied of, that they could have no satisfaction in this life, but only in hopes of repenting, and being reconciled to God sometime before they die;—by which *sad delusion*, infinite numbers of souls have been lost for ever, and infinite numbers are like to follow them, unless Christians can be persuaded to see the danger of a *death-bed repentance*.

Christians, for the most part, are but too careless how they live, and only think of making a *good end*, as they call it; that is, to be sorry that they have not been converted sooner,—to pray God to forgive them,

—to make fair promises of becoming new men, if it shall please God to spare them,—and to be recommended to the mercy and favour of God by his Ministers.

After all, this is not repentance unto salvation:—For one must not only be sorry for what he has done amiss;—he must not only beg God's pardon and resolve to amend;—but, to prove that his repentance is sincere, he must redeem his mispent time, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance;—he must not only *promise to become*, but *really be, a new man*; lest he find himself in the condition of unhappy Esau, "who found no place for repentance, though he sought it earnestly with tears."<sup>1</sup>

Christians should therefore consider seriously that the terms of salvation are fixed in the Gospel, and unalterable; that *without holiness no man must see the Lord*;—that the state of those that defer their repentance grows every day more desperate, because God withdraws his grace as men despise it;—that the judgment of the unfruitful tree, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?" may be passed upon a sinner when he least thinks of it;—that the merciful invitation, "Seek ye the Lord while he may be found," does suppose, that there is a time when he will not be found of them that seek him; and that the state of sinners may be so provoking, that though never so many prayers should be made for them; though *Noah, Daniel, and Job*, should pray for them; yet God will not hear their prayers.

If these considerations, and the uncertainty of life, on one hand, and the glorious promises of an endless life on the other, will not prevail with people to repent in time, and to prepare for death, and the judgment that must follow, their hearts must be as hard as the nether mill-stone, and they must undoubtedly perish, and that without remedy.

To prevent this dreadful punishment, all serious people will endeavour to keep the *great Day of Judgment* much in their thoughts; and *these* will be the *fruits* of their doing so:—They will first consider, *that God is to be their judge*;—God "whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men;"—God, "who will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil."—God, who will then "make manifest the counsels of the heart."

These considerations also will put a stop to a thousand evils, to which our corrupt hearts are subject:—Am I sure that this base action, which I am going to do, must one day be brought to light, and the world must

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 17.    <sup>2</sup> Isaiah lv. 6.



see how unlike an honest man, how unlike a Christian, I acted, in hopes that I should never be discovered?

Shall I oppress the poor and helpless, because it is in the power of my hand to do it, when at that *great day* he will be as great as I, and will have this advantage of *me*, that the Almighty God will then plead his cause for him against them that had him in contempt?

Shall I take pleasure in works of darkness, such as cannot bear the light *now*, when I believe they must then be made manifest to the eternal shame and confusion of all that lived in them?

Shall the fear of man make me ashamed or afraid of doing my duty, after so plain warning given me by my Judge himself?—"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

Shall I set my heart upon the world, when the same Lord and Judge has so plainly shewed the folly of doing so, by one short question; "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

Shall I take upon me to judge, to censure, and to condemn, the actions of others, when I neither know the motives nor reasons of their actions,—in express contradiction to the command of God, who has said, "Judge nothing before the time;" and "why dost thou judge thy brother?" For "we shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ."

In one word:—People of any sort of consideration will immediately put a stop to every evil *thought*, to every *design*, to every *word*, to every *action*, which they have reason to fear will rise up in judgment against them at that day;—or, if they have not put a stop to them, they will resolve to repent heartily and in time;—to make *restitution* where they have done injuries, as far as they can, and justice requires;—*to do good*, while it is in their power, and *to communicate*, remembering, *that with such sacrifices God is pleased*, and appeased;—to be sincere and upright in all their actions, because our Judge is the searcher of hearts;—lastly, to improve all their talents and opportunities of doing good and glorifying God, because they are then to give an account of them.

But the COMING OF CHRIST to judge the world is matter of *comfort* to Christians, as well as *terror*. "Then," saith the Apostle, "shall every man have praise of God;" that is, every man that has endeavoured to

deserve it. And our Lord and Judge has expressly set down the sentence he will pass upon his faithful servants at that day:—

"Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." And that we may not expect judgment without mercy, (unless we have been unmerciful to others) the Apostle assures us, that "we have not an high-priest, which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." We may therefore hope for all the favour that our case will bear.

Besides all this,—The innocence of injured persons will then be vindicated;—the reputations which have been unjustly blasted will then be set right;—good men will then receive a recompence for the injuries they met with, and patiently suffered;—the Poor, who have served God to the best of their power, will then find sufficient amends for what they wanted in this world;—the Rich, who were so wise as *to make to themselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness*, will find themselves no losers by their charity;—and the persecuted for righteousness' sake will here find that blessedness which their Saviour so faithfully promised.

In one word: Now the *merciful* shall obtain mercy;—now the pure in heart shall see God;—now they that did hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled;—now the meek shall inherit the earth, the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness;—and now the poor in spirit, and the peace-makers, shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. For this is the day of recompence, in which every man shall receive according to his works done in the body, whether they have been good or bad.

And let no man think that his condition will free him from a strict account at that day.—All have received talents more or less; and all are accountable for them: Even they that have received the least will find it so. For we are sent into the world upon *trial*:—Some have riches and plenty, to try what use they will make of them; whether they will be kind to their fellow-creatures that are in want; whether they will use their abundance with sobriety, be thankful and humble. Others are poor, to see whether they will behave themselves honestly, be content with their condition, and rely upon God, who can and will, if they deserve it, make up in the next life what they want in this. Some are in authority, and others are bound to obey; some are in affliction, whilst others enjoy prosperity; some are ignorant, and others

<sup>a</sup> Matth. x. 28. <sup>b</sup> Rom. xiv. 10, 12. <sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. iv. 5.

<sup>d</sup> Math. xxv. 34. <sup>e</sup> Heb. iv. 15.



learned; some make a figure in the world, and many are scarcely taken notice of. And yet all these different states and conditions are designed to fit us for a blessed eternity, which all are made for, and all are capable of enjoying, if it be not their own fault:—And the rule by which we must all be judged will not be, *how great or how learned* we have been, but *how we have behaved ourselves* in that state of life in which the providence of God did place us; *with this difference*,—to whom much was given, of him much will be required.

Now, the sum of what I have been saying is this, and what I would desire we may all carry home with us; namely, that there will be a *Day of Judgment* as sure as there is a God; there will be such a day, whether men believe it, whether they think of it or not. The Gospel is the rule by which we must all be judged. The rules of the Gospel, by which we must be judged, are plain and positive. In short; they are these:—That all sin unrepented of shall be punished with everlasting flames; and that all such as, being awakened by these terrible truths, do forsake every evil way, do judge and condemn themselves that they may not be condemned of the Lord, shall be pardoned and made eternally happy. So that nothing can secure us against the worst that can happen, but a timely repentance. But then we must remember, that no repentance can be depended upon, but where men live to *bring forth fruits meet for repentance*, that is, answerable to amendment of life.

And pray let us consider, that of all who are already dead, the condition is unalterable; they are in a state of happiness or misery, and will be so for ever; and this will be the condition of every one of us, of myself, and of all you that hear me, within a very few years.

Inspire us, gracious God, with a true sense of the danger we are in;—that we may

no longer follow our corrupt inclinations;—that we may no longer put off our conversion;—that we may not be indifferent and careless, when *Death, Judgment, Heaven, and Hell*, are the things we are deliberating about!

May the continual thoughts of *death* mortify in us all pride and vanity, all covetousness and worldly-mindedness, all carnal security and fondness for this life, and oblige us to a strict watchfulness, while we continue in this state of trial!

May the consideration of a *judgment to come* oblige us to a sincere holiness, and make us careful of our thoughts, designs, words, and actions; oblige us to try, to examine, to judge ourselves, and to endeavour to appease our judge, by prayers, by tears, by alms, by mortification, and by all other expressions of a true repentance, that in the day of visitation we may find mercy!

And if the difficulties of an holy life affright us, if the commands of Jesus Christ seem hard to flesh and blood, let us consider—who can dwell with everlasting burnings? The good Lord grant, that we *may* consider and take pains *now*, that we may escape the bitter pains of eternal death! “This day,” saith our Blessed Saviour to the penitent thief, “this day shalt thou be with me in *Paradise*.” And oh! that the constant expectation of that happy day, and a faith and hope full of immortality, may sweeten all the troubles of this mortal life; raise, O Lord, our sense and value for the joys of Paradise so high, that we may no longer doat upon the short appearances of happiness we meet with here!

O Jesus, who hast redeemed us with thy precious blood, deliver us from the dreadful judgment of the last day, that we may be numbered with thy Saints in glory everlasting, for thy mercy's sake! To whom, with the Father &c.

## S E R M O N LXII.

### THE DUTY OF SELF-DENIAL.

I COR. XV. 32, 33.

*Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. Be not deceived: Evil Communications corrupt Good Manners.\**

**T**HERE is nothing *so serious*, but wicked men will make a jest of it. To make a jest of *dying* is so monstrous, that one would think human nature could hardly be capable of it. But the truth is, very many,

who dare not *speaking* at this rate, do yet live at this rate: That is, they will not deny themselves any sort of satisfaction this life affords, *let what will follow*;—they will enjoy the good things of this world while they

\* See Luke xii. 20. Heb. ix. 27. Deut. xxxii. 29. Numb. xxiii. 10. Prov. xxiii. 20. Isaiah xxii. 12, 13. lvi. 12. Wisd. ii. 6. Eccles. vii. ult. xviii. 31. can,



can, and not trouble their heads or their hearts with cares and fears of what may come hereafter;—in short, *Death*, let them talk of it never so familiarly, is the very least of their thoughts.

We are not now speaking of wicked infidels, who believe nothing of a world to come; but of the generality of Christians, who profess to believe a judgment to come, and rewards and punishments in another life: Even many of these are as little concerned for the condition in which death will put them as the meekest heathens.

They that are rich are but too apt to take it for granted, that they have a right to please themselves in spending their incomes.

They that need not work for their daily bread, but have time to spare, conclude that it cannot be better spent than in diverting themselves.

Such as are young will very hardly be persuaded to believe any other, but that *theirs* is the age of pleasure and delight, and that it would be ridiculous to talk of *death* to them that are but just come into the world.

And even when men come to be old, they are apt to put the thoughts of death far from them, and to make the remainder of their lives as easy and pleasant as possibly they can, by not thinking of what must become of them when they die.

So that, in short, corrupt nature, multitude of examples, an untoward way of reasoning, all combine and plead for *this*:—*That the great business of life is to make ourselves easy while we may*;—that we need not deny ourselves, nor take up the cross,—and that, if it is forced upon us, we may lay it down as soon as ever we can;—and that to do otherwise would be to make ourselves fools and miserable without any reason: for who would not be easy when he may?

And the truth is, these are things so very grateful to flesh and blood, that one would despair of ever convincing Christians of the necessity of laying restraints upon themselves, if Jesus Christ and his Apostles had not so often declared *the absolute necessity of Self-Denial* in order to eternal happiness, and by their examples and voluntary sufferings taught us—how very little the pleasures or the miseries of this world are in comparison of those of the next life.

The Apostle St. Paul, whose words we have chosen for the text, was well aware how very apt people are to indulge themselves, and to persuade others to do so too:—“Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die;” to which sort of argument he makes this reply; “Be not deceived; evil

communications corrupt good manners;” that is, take care of being led into a wicked error—of believing, for instance, that to cast away care is the way to be freed from it,—that to strive to please one’s self is the way to be happy,—and that, when we die, there is an end of all pleasure as well as pain. For these are not the reasonings of people who live by Scripture, but they are the discourses of such as, having corrupted themselves, desire to corrupt all others, that they may have companions in their infidelity.—This is what is plainly implied in St. Paul’s answer.

Now; that which I aim at in the discourse I am going to make upon these words is this:—

*First*; We acknowledge that what such people say is really true; “to-morrow we die;” that is, our time is really short, and we ought to make use of it while it lasts. But then,

*Secondly*; This is no reason why we should give up ourselves to sensual pleasures; for these will neither make our lives longer, nor our deaths happy. But,

*Thirdly*; This is what, in all reason, we should resolve upon,—that since we must die so soon, our hearts shall not be set upon such pleasures as will make us forget the end of our creation; such as will make death more bitter to us when we come to die, and will quite unfit us for that happiness which after death good men are sure to enjoy.

*Lastly*; Therefore we ought, as we value our souls, to avoid the company and conversation of all such as would persuade us, either by their words or examples, to follow our natural inclinations, which, if we do not resist them, will infallibly ruin us for ever.

I. And first, *This is certainly true, TO-MORROW WE DIE*; our lives are short, and they are uncertain; we *may* die in a few days, but we *shall* die in a few years. Why, all people own this.—That is very true;—but then, there is a great deal of difference betwixt owning a thing, and considering, and being convinced of its importance.

A man that considers, and is convinced of any thing of moment that concerns himself, will have it much in his thoughts, and much at heart. Is it thus that Christians are convinced of the shortness and uncertainty of this present life? Is it thus they are convinced of the reality of a life after death?—It is plain they are not. Shall it be said, for instance, that men who make no scruple how they live,—no conscience of their ways,—who spend their lives in sin and vanity,—who know they are sinners, and



and at enmity with God, and yet never think of making their peace by a timely repentance;—can it be said with any truth, that such are *convinced* that they are in a very little time, perhaps ere this day twelve-month, to die, and that from that moment, if they die in their sins, they are to be miserable for ever?

And indeed this is the case, not only of such as live in open rebellion against God, but of all such as pass their days without any concern whether they have got such habits of *virtue*, of *piety*, *humility*, *charity*, and *purity*, as are absolutely necessary to fit them for Heaven.

Let us but observe the behaviour of such as we are sure *are* convinced of the shortness of their time;—such, for instance, as are under the *sentence of death*, or such as are seized with some mortal distemper:—These we shall find, if they have any sense of religion, more concerned for their everlasting well-being, than for all the world beside. How seriously do they lament their mispent time!—How much convinced are they of the madness of that mirth which made them put off their conversion!—What self-denial, what mortification, would not they wish to have chosen, which might have cured them of those sins which now lie heavy upon their consciences?

It is but too plain that people in health are not generally thus affected, and therefore we justly conclude, that their belief of a life to come, and of the uncertainty of this life, is of little advantage to them;—they have not considered what it is to die before they are prepared for such a change.

Indeed, if the bitterness of death were past, when once our heads are laid in the grave, it would be of no great moment what lives we lead, or what end we make;—but when we have the greatest assurance, that “God will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good or evil;” that “they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire;” the knowledge and belief of this makes death a very serious thing indeed, and not to be thought of, not to be spoken of, but with great concern. And it is as absurd to persuade people to divert themselves, and drive away the thoughts of death, as to tell a man who is in debt, that the best way is not to think of his accounts, nor to make agreement with his creditors, till they have cast him into prison.

If Christians would but consider the work they have to do, “before the night cometh when no man can work,” they would be better able to judge how much time of a

short life they have to spend in sin and vanity. For besides the particular duties of every man's proper condition and calling,—whether he be *magistrate* or *subject*,—whether *master* or *servant*,—whether *parent* or *child*,—whether *poor* or *rich*, (all these having their proper duties to learn and to discharge as they will answer to God;—) besides these, we have another life to provide for:—We have all sinned, and as we hope for pardon from God, we must all repent, and “bring forth fruits meet for repentance.” We are all in the midst of temptations, and all stand in need of God's grace and assistance, which no man must expect without praying for them daily. And lastly, (*which I beseech you to take especial notice of*) every soul who hopes to be happy in the next life *must be restored to the image of God, in which we were created, before he leaves this world.*

It will not be sufficient, after a long life spent in *vanity*, in thinking of nothing but the things of this world,—or it may be in sinful pleasures,—it will not be enough to say when we come to die, I am sorry I have lived at this careless rate, and I hope God will forgive me and make me happy; for be assured of it, good Christians, every one that does not sincerely love God *here*,—who does not desire to be like him,—who does not love what he loves, and hate what he hates,—who does not, with all his heart, desire to please God by keeping his commandments,—who does not love his neighbour, do him good when it is in his power, be just to him in all his dealings, &c.;—whoever has not strove to wean his affections from sensual pleasures, and made the service of God, in some good measure, his delight as well as his duty;—whoever has not done this *here*, must not hope to be happy hereafter.

It is necessary, *absolutely necessary*, that Christians should know this, that they may “work out their salvation with fear and trembling;” that is, with the concern of people whose souls are at stake; that they may not only carefully avoid all such sins as make them enemies to God, and will shut them out of Heaven, but that they may be always endeavouring to get such dispositions as may fit them for the company of Saints and Angels, by following the rules of the Gospel, which are given us for this very purpose, “to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light.”

This is what Christians that have any concern for their souls should do; and one would hope that there are many (God increase their number!) that do so; but there are too many who choose another way of thinking and living, who think they make the



the best use of a short life by giving themselves up either to *sensual pleasures*, or to the *cares of this world*, by which they may keep far from them *the thoughts of death*. But after all,

II. *This method will neither make their lives more easy, nor their deaths more happy.*

It will not make their lives more easy, because of the *ignorance*, the *uncertainty*, and the *fears*, which attend them. It is impossible a man can be easy, who is not sure but that he may be very miserable when he dies;—who is so little satisfied with his own condition, that he does not care to think of it, or to know how it is like to go with him;—who is forced to run into *company*, or *business*, or *pleasures*, to avoid the knowledge of himself.

We are apt enough to be fond of any thing which we think to be valuable in ourselves, and to be pleased with the thoughts of it; and therefore, when we care not for thinking of our souls, it is most sure we do not think them in any measure safe, and out of danger.

But however men may contrive to keep off the fears of death, neither business, nor pleasures, can keep off death itself. It is then men begin to see their error, when they find themselves going to be parted for ever from all earthly satisfactions, which till now had hindered them from considering their latter end; which the Wise Man thus truly sets forth:—"O Death! how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things:" And the reason is, because he has no hopes of a better life, and is tormented to think of losing the happiness of this so soon.

III. And this leads us to the third thing which we mentioned; namely, *That this is what in all reason we should resolve upon,—that since we must die so soon, not to set our hearts upon such things as will make us forget the end of our creation; such as will make death more bitter to us, and unfit us for that happiness which after death good men are sure to enjoy.*

*Self-Denial* is a duty very much neglected, and yet it is what the Christian religion has made a means of our salvation. We all pretend to be making the best of our way to Heaven, and most Christians are satisfied and hope to be happy without much trouble or hazard. On the other hand, that very Gospel which we take for our rule speaks very much of denying ourselves, of suffering afflictions, and teaches us that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Ecclus. xli. i.

Christians may be apt to imagine that these and such-like Scriptures do not belong to us, but only to times of persecution. But, alas! Christians are in more danger *now* than in times of persecution. Now they are in danger—of falling in love with the world,—of setting up their rest here,—of thinking themselves safe,—of following their inclinations without controul;—in one word, of forgetting their latter end, and neglecting to prepare for it, by weaning their affections from the love of this world.

Now every Christian, who has made the experiment, knows for certain, that to bring one's mind to such a temper will require trouble, pains, and time; will be a work of conflict and tribulation. We must deny ourselves a great many things for which we have a great desire;—we must not only avoid things in themselves *sinful*, but sometimes things that are *indifferent*, in order to get the mastery over our own will;—we must not only avoid intemperance, but sometimes even moderate refreshment. So saith our Lord; "In those days shall my disciples fast;" not from *sin* only, as foolish people pervert the Scriptures, for that we are at all times to abstain from; but that fasting and mortification, which religion requires of us, consists in such a sparing use of the creatures, and in such a forbearance even from lawful pleasures, *sometimes*, as may deaden our love for the world, and hinder us from being captivated by it. And therefore a very great man, and most extraordinary Christian,<sup>2</sup> was used to say, that to deny one's self in things indifferent (consistent with health and civility) was a secret, the greatest one friend could communicate to another.

Pursuant to this, we must not only forsake the company and conversation of the wicked and profane, but sometimes *even all company*, that we may be better able to take an account of the state of our souls,—that we may make the thoughts of death easy to us, by preparing for it,—and that we may loosen the bands that fasten us to the world.

And one may say with truth, that when men will not afflict themselves, it is usual with God, in the way of his Providence, to bring afflictions upon them whether they will or not; and especially upon those whom he owns for his children; because all sin must be punished either here or hereafter.

And though we are apt to complain of the miseries, the disappointments, and the crosses of this life, yet indeed they are the greatest blessings we meet with;—they bring us, if we do not resist his will, they bring us the very nearest way to God;—they are necessary, and they are designed, to fit us for Heaven;

<sup>2</sup> Dr. More.



to *awaken*, to *convince*, and to *reduce* us, when we forget or neglect the ONE THING NEEDFUL, the care of our souls.

I shall conclude this particular with the words of Jesus Christ, in the account of the rich man and Lazarus:—"Son, remember that thou in thy life-time receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus his evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented."—The remembrance of which words will ever serve to two excellent purposes; they will *restrain* us when we are eagerly fond of the good things of this life, lest we should receive all our good here; and they will comfort those that want what the world doats on, in hopes that what they want *here*, if it is not their own fault, will be made up to them hereafter.

IV. By this time, Christians, you have in part seen *how carefully you should avoid the company and conversation of loose people, and people of loose principles*, especially of such as do make a jest of *self-denial*, and would lead us, by their words or example, to *follow our own natural inclinations*.

And yet the most ignorant Christian knows this is wrong; and if they have any spark of grace, they take care that their children shall not have *their will*, because they know it would ruin them.

They know, for instance, that if they may keep what company they please, they will never learn any thing that is good;—that if they fall into idle company, they will never be serious;—if they may please their own appetites, they will be gluttons or drunkards.

Why now, is not this the case of older people, who, by the company they keep, get habits of *intemperance*, of *sloth*, of *trifling* away their time, till at last they forget *themselves*, their *God*, and their *latter end*, and act as foolishly as if they had but the sense and the resolution of children?

But even this is not the worst of keeping the company of evil men: There is manifestly a spirit of *infidelity*, of *profaneness*, of *irreligion*, gone out into the world; and a man can hardly go into a mixed company, but he is in danger of infection, and a thousand to one but he leaves the company less *serious*, less *resolved*, or less *bold*, than when he went into it.

There are every where too many who make a jest of things sacred, and who, because they know they cannot reason men out of their religion and hopes of Heaven, will endeavour to laugh them out of their seriousness, and out of their senses; which is very often the effect of *revelling* and *drunkenness*.

There are few people but at the beginning think themselves proof against such contagion, who yet live to see themselves sadly mistaken; they make the liberties other people take a measure for their own; and do not know, perhaps, that the man they admire is at the bottom an errant atheist, who therefore lives according to his principle.—You believe a God, a judgment, and rewards and punishments hereafter, and yet you live just as he does; it is great odds that you will believe as he does at the long run, whatever you may think for the present. "Wine, and new wine," (saith Solomon) "take away the heart;" you will find it so to your sorrow, when death approaches, and when it will be too late to return to a sober mind.

In short; in whatever company men make a mock of sin,—speak lightly of *God*, his *Word*, his *Ministers*, his *House*, his *Day*, or of any thing that *belongs to him*;—Satan governs in that company, inspires his instruments, infects more or less all that are present, and they certainly become more his servants than before.

So that, in truth, nothing but an obstinate resolution of avoiding the company and conversation of men of loose *principles*, and loose *manners*, can hinder a man from forfeiting that grace, which alone can secure him from being abandoned of God, and given up to a reprobate mind.

To come to a conclusion of this discourse, and to the uses we ought to make of it:—

And first, no Christian ought to be easy till he can have some comfortable hopes, that it will not be worse with him in the next world than it is in this: And I beg you will believe and remember this important truth, *that a timely preparation for death will deliver us from the fear of death, and from all other fears*.

If you find a satisfaction in forgetting yourself, and diverting the thoughts of death, depend upon it, your case is bad; for it is the case of every good Christian as well as St. Paul's, *TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN*: And though *nature* will not subscribe to this, yet *grace* will.

And be assured of this,—that he who attempts to get rid of his fears by running from God, will most certainly increase them, as every man will find who runs into company as a remedy against thinking.

It is astonishing to see Christians very well pleased to hear the most serious things made a jest of; it is not because such things are ridiculous, but because men's lives are corrupt, and they wish secretly that there were no truth in the things they have believed.



lieved. But then how sad is their case, who have no comfort but in hopes that God's word may prove false!

That you may avoid the witchery of EVIL COMMUNICATIONS, be persuaded to believe, *that one need but taste a sinful pleasure a very little, to become fond of and a slave to it.* This is seldom considered till the poison is swallowed, and men are become incurable.

In short; whether people are in jest or in earnest when they speak of dying, death is a very serious subject, nothing on earth ought to divert us from thinking of and preparing for it;—the moment we die, our fate is determined for ever and ever. This we should often think of, lest the health we enjoy, and the seeming distance of entering upon eternity, should make us careless.

To prevent this, let us keep a strict watch over all our senses, lest intemperance get the mastery over us; remembering the warning Jesus Christ has given us, "Take heed, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and the cares of this life, and so that day overtake you unawares."

And now I believe I have said enough to persuade every serious Christian, that has heard and understands me, to resolve to set apart some time in every week of his life to think of death, and to ask himself—how he is prepared for it? And that I may help his

\* Luke xxi. 34.

meditations on that subject, I will just set before him what a wise man, when he comes to die, will wish he had done:—

He will then wish, that he had made a just and Christian settlement of his temporal concerns, so as not to be distracted with the cares of this world, when his heart and thoughts should be upon another.

He will then wish, that he had made his peace with God by a timely repentance;—that he had lived to God's glory in discharging faithfully the duties of his calling;—that he had weaned his affections from, and loosened the bands that fasten us to the world.

He will wish, that he had crucified the flesh with all its sinful lusts, that being weary of this life, he might be more desirous of a better;—and that by acts of mercy and charity, he had entitled himself to the mercy of God at the hour of death, and at the Day of Judgment, when he will most stand in need of it.

And lastly, he will then wish, that he had got such habits of patience and resignation to the will of God during his health, as may render death, with all the train of evils leading to it, less frightful and amazing.

These are the things we shall all wish for when death approaches; and these should be the practice of every Christian's life; which God grant they may, and especially of myself, and of every one that now hears me.

## S E R M O N LXIII.

### THE MISTAKES OF CHRISTIANS CONCERNING REPENTANCE.

A C T S iii. 19.

*Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.\**

**M**OST people are very ready to own that they are *sinners*; and that they stand in need of God's mercy and pardon. And all Christians pretend to know, that without repentance nobody can possibly be restored to God's favour, or ever attain that happiness which we all hope for after death. And repentance being a natural duty, most Christians, by considering what they expect from others who have wronged or offended them, are convinced that something agreeable to that will be expected by God from such as have offended *him*.

Notwithstanding all this, Repentance is a duty the *most neglected* and *mistaken* of any other Christian duty.

It is generally put off to the last.

People are apt to think that repentance is necessary *only* where men have fallen into great and crying sins;—and when, upon any consideration whatever, they have left off to commit such sins, they look upon themselves as in a hopeful way of salvation.

Many are apt to imagine, that repentance is nothing but a concern and sorrow for ha-

\* See Ps. xxxii. 1, 5. xxxviii. 18. li. 13. Jer. iii. 12, 13. Matth. iii. 8, 9. Luke xxiv. 46, 47. Acts xvii. 30, 31. 2 Cor. vii. 10. Tit. ii. 11.



ving done amiss, and trusting that God, for Christ's sake, will pardon them;—and too, too many place repentance in confessing their sins, protesting to be sorry for them, and promising not to repeat them; and are satisfied with this, without any serious endeavours of amendment.

And lastly, most Christians imagine, that repentance is in their own power; that they can set about it, and perform it, when *they* please; and do not know that it is *the gift of God*, and that it must, as all other graces, be asked of God, with earnestness, humility, and with a sincere design of forsaking every evil way.

Now, such mistakes as these will be an occasion of very sad consequences; and too many Christians (it is to be feared) will find those sins charged upon them, at the great account, which they did suppose they had repented of, and were forgiven them.

To prevent *these mistakes* as much as may be, Christians should consider, that *repentance and conversion are not to be separated*. The Spirit of God has joined them together in the text: "Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." And, Acts xxvi. 20, "Repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." Not to mention many more passages in the Sacred Scriptures, where this is expressly said, or intimated.

Now, if this were well considered, Christians would have other thoughts of repentance than what they generally entertain. They would see plainly, for instance,

That if *to repent is to be converted*, then—no degree of sorrow, no acts of mortification, which do not produce amendment of life, can be *true repentance*;—

That not only *notorious sinners* have need of repentance to be reconciled unto God, but that all who are born in sin *are the children of wrath*, and have therefore need, by repentance, to be restored to God's favour and acceptance;—

That there is *no true conversion*, and therefore *no true repentance*, where men forsake *some* sins only, and live in others; all sins being forbidden of God, and displeasing to him;—

That if a sincere resolution of forsaking the sins men *confess* do not accompany their confession, it is what the wickedest man on earth may do, as well as the most holy, and therefore can be no sure mark of *true repentance*;—

That to *resolve to repent* without calling in the assistance of God's grace, would be as absurd as to attempt to raise the dead, or to command light out of darkness, or to make

a new creation;—forasmuch as *to be converted* is to become a *new creature*; it is to be turned *from darkness to light*; it is to be raised from the *death* of sin unto the *life* of righteousness, which none but God can effect;—and

Lastly; Christians would easily perceive the great absurdity of *putting off repentance unto the last*, because if a man cannot give a proof of his repentance by a change of life, he will want one of the *greatest comforts* of a *death-bed*; one of the best marks of a *repentance unto life*, which is *doing works meet for repentance*; that is, answerable to amendment of life.

In short; repentance is a means by which a sinner is restored to the favour of God; *it is a step to conversion*; but if *conversion* do not follow, it is only *a repentance to be repented of*.

And Christians sadly deceive themselves when they imagine, that any thing less than being restored to the image of God, in which we were at first created, can restore us to God's favour. "If any man be in Christ," (saith the Apostle) "If any man be in Christ," that is, a sincere Christian, "he is a new creature;" his former life and affections are changed for the better; he sets his heart on things above; he has quite other aims than he had before; for now he follows no longer the inclinations of corrupted nature, but denies himself, resists temptations, prays for grace to withstand them, and finds a real pleasure in mortifying his corrupt affections. "Behold, all things are become new," saith the Apostle; a new heart, new desires, an enlightened understanding, a will obedient to the will and law of God.—Where repentance ends in *this*, it is such as it should be; *it is repentance unto life not to be repented of*.

Now; that all our humiliations and repentance may have this blessed effect, *to turn us from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God*; it is absolutely necessary, that we be thoroughly convinced of this *great truth*, that we have in us the seeds of all manner of wickedness, ready to spring up, and break out into sinful actions upon the first occasion, if not restrained by the grace of God. We are all of the same *race* and *make* with *St. Peter*, who denied his Lord and Saviour,—with *Judas*, who betrayed him,—with *Pilate*, who condemned him against his conscience,—with the *Jews*, who crucified him,—with *Herod*, who murdered the innocent children,—with the *men of Sodom*, whose sin was punished with fire and brimstone,—and with *those of the old world*, who brought upon themselves an universal destruction.



Though, I say, the corruption of our nature has not discovered itself in such wickedness as these, yet we have the *root and seed of all these, and of all other sins, in us*; and we ought to know this, and to know, that *on this account* we are utterly unfit for the favour of God; and should certainly feel his everlasting displeasure, but that Jesus Christ has purchased our redemption by his most precious blood; and has put us into a way of regaining the favour of God, and of attaining everlasting salvation, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

I say again, that it is absolutely necessary that we should *know and feel this our miserable estate and condition*; to the end, that seeing our misery, we may more earnestly look out for help, embrace it when it is offered us, and be careful not to provoke the divine justice to leave us to ourselves, and in that sad estate into which we are fallen;—that we may be afraid to make our condition worse by continuing in rebellion against God, when he is so gracious as to pardon us upon our sincere repentance, and change of heart and life;—and lastly, that feeling our misery, we may not defer our repentance till it be too late to recover that image of God which we have lost in the Fall.

Indeed the corrupt heart of man can find out many motives to repentance less painful than this; but this is the true Gospel motive:—“They that are whole,” (saith our Lord<sup>d</sup>) “need not a physician, but they that are sick:” They will feel the need they have of help; they will perceive the necessity, not only of forsaking the sins they have been guilty of, but of mortifying that corrupt nature which is the spring and source of all sin.

In order to *this*, they will thankfully lay hold of the means of salvation offered them by Jesus Christ;—they will receive *him* for their Saviour and Law-giver, and *his Gospel* as the rule by which they ought to live, since by it they must be judged.

In short; they will not, they cannot be easy, until, by the grace of God, they have in some good measure overcome their evil and corrupt affections,—until they see and are persuaded that there is a change wrought in them for the better: And this, not on account of any worldly considerations, (for that is the repentance of heathens) but because they *now* perceive, That sin is an offence to God;—that the laws of God are just and good, and that men are highly guilty before God who break them;—that therefore they think themselves bound in duty and gratitude to strive with all their might to keep the commandments of God,

and by this means to gain his favour, and such dispositions as may fit them for Heaven.

I have already shewn you, good Christians, that the *first step* to repentance is to know, and be sensible of it, *that we are by nature subject to all manner of wickedness*; and that our nature must be changed before we can hope for any communion with God, or by him to be made happy.

I will *now* shew you how this must be done:—Our blessed Saviour himself will direct you: “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;” that is, If you are so sensible of your sad estate as to be weary of it, and in earnest desire to become new creatures, by faith in me you shall be forgiven what is past, and by my Spirit ye shall be enabled to put on *the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*, that is, This great change is to be wrought only by faith in the Son of God, who died for us, to assure us of the sincere love of God for his poor creatures; and that he is thoroughly reconciled to *them*, if *they* will lay hold of the means he has proposed to them (in his Gospel) *for their conversion*; which are,—1<sup>st</sup>, A firm faith in the power of God. 2<sup>dly</sup>; Earnest prayer to God for light to see what is evil in us, and for strength to overcome and root it out. And 3<sup>dly</sup>; A sincere endeavour to do what we are able to do: For God seeing us really desirous to please him in what we are able, will not let us want grace to overcome all our corruptions, till at last we have recovered the image of God, *the New Man*.

In short, and to be as plain as possible, THE END OF RELIGION is, *to make men more perfect and happy than they are by nature*; that God may take delight in us, seeing us, in some good measure, restored to his own likeness.

In order to this, the Christian religion proposeth to us *Jesus Christ*, as having by his meritorious death and passion obtained eternal redemption *for all such as should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance*; that is, God is pleased, for Christ’s sake, to overlook the untowardness of our nature, and to make trial of us while we continue in this world, whether we will endeavour to regain such dispositions to virtue and holiness as may fit us for Heaven.

In order to this, we are, by baptism, received into Christ’s family, where we have his protection, the assistance of his Holy Spirit, and all other means necessary to make us *new creatures*; for a *new creation* we must be made, as ever we hope to be saved.

Now, all such as lay hold of this mercy, and strive sincerely to *perfect holiness in the fear*

<sup>d</sup> Matth. ix. 12.



*fear of God*;—such as resolve to walk worthy of so great a favour;—who, being truly sensible of their own weakness, depend entirely upon God's grace, and ask it most earnestly;—who, knowing the dangers they are exposed to, do therefore walk warily, that they may avoid the temptations and snares of the Devil;—who, when they have done amiss, are sorry for it, and strive with all their might to do so no more,—*denying ungodliness and worldly lusts*,—taking care that their *conversation be such as becomes the Gospel of Christ*,—submitting their wills to the will of God,—*seeking first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness*:—

Whoever has, by the grace of God, brought himself to live after this manner, may very truly be said to be *a new creation*, and as such acceptable to God, and worthy to be made by him eternally happy.

By this time, I hope, good Christians, you see, That your everlasting welfare depends upon the sincerity of your repentance;—that not only great and crying sins are to be repented of, but our very nature is to be changed, before we can hope to be approved of God;—that no degree of sorrow, no outward signs of mortification or self-denial, will profit us, where there is not an inward conviction and conversion of the soul to God;—that we mock God, and deceive ourselves most wretchedly, when we confess our sins without a full purpose of leaving them, and living better for the time to come;—that a Christian's life is a *state of repentance*, in which he must always be getting the mastery over his corruptions, and labouring daily to grow better;—that to defer our repentance to the last, is to depend upon a miracle for our salvation, and a miracle which we have no reason to believe God will work for us, since we have provoked him all our days to leave us to our own hard and impenitent hearts, when we come to die.

Lastly, I hope by this time you are convinced, that repentance is not so much a *command* as a *privilege*, and the greatest favour that ever God offered to mankind. It is plain the Jews thought so: “Then hath God also “to the Gentiles granted repentance unto “life.”<sup>a</sup> A favour which they thought God would never have vouchsafed a people of whom they had the meanest opinion.

But God, you see, has granted even to us Gentiles *this mighty favour*. Let us then not abuse this glorious privilege; let us not be bold to break the laws of God, because he has afforded us a remedy.

It is true indeed, that when God affords men time to repent, when he gives them

<sup>a</sup> Tit. ii. 11. <sup>f</sup> Phil. i. 27. <sup>s</sup> Matth. xi. 10. <sup>b</sup> Acts xi. 18.

grace to do so, when they live to bring forth fruits meet for repentance; these are all invaluable blessings. But still it is to be considered, that it is better not to sin, than after to repent. The father's answer to his eldest son ought to be well considered by those that will be making experiments, how gracious God may be to them upon their repentance: “I never disobeyed at any time thy commands.” “Son,” saith the father, “all that I have is thine.”

The ways of sin are extremely dangerous, and true repentance is a work so laborious and irksome, that nothing but the hopes of salvation, with the assistance of God, could encourage any man to go through with it; and yet it is no burthen, but a favour, since by it we escape eternal misery, to which no trouble ought to be compared.

To conclude:—And let me once again admonish you, *That the Design of Religion is, to turn men from darkness to light*;—that all hopes of pardon are vain and deceitful, when amendment of life does not follow;—and that *that* repentance is not like to continue long, which is not accompanied with most hearty prayers to God for the continuance of his grace.

And be persuaded, good Christians, to believe, that it is because men are not truly *converted*, that they look upon the Christian religion as a burthen rather than a blessing, and the happiest state a man can choose.

The reason is plain: They repent (as they call it) of their sins, without changing their affections; they hug that very sin in their heart, which *custom* or *fear* makes them renounce with their lips; and then it is no wonder that they hate that religion which obliges them to hate what they are resolved to love.

In one word;—Let us not separate conversion from repentance, nor think we have made our peace with God, until we have pronounced a righteous judgment upon ourselves; and until we can say with truth,—By the grace of God, my heart is changed as well as my outward behaviour; I hate, avoid, and pray against, those sins which formerly I loved and run headlong after; I now feel the blessing of being freed from the *slavery* of sin, which therefore I am resolved to resist all the days of my life. Then Repentance would be counted a *favour*, and Religion a *state of liberty*, and Jesus Christ our *best friend*, and his Gospel our *safest rule*, and his yoke easy, and his burthen light.

Which God grant we may all experience to our present and everlasting comfort, thro' the same Jesus Christ our Lord.



## S E R M O N LXIV.

PREACHED IN LENT.

THE CAUSES OF IMPENITENCY; AND WHAT IT IS WHICH HINDERS OUR CONVERSION.

H E B. xii. 1, 2.

*Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which does so easily beset us; and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the Author (or Beginner) and Finisher of our Faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right-hand of the Throne of God.<sup>1</sup>*

GOOD Christians! the Church now calling upon us all *to repent, to turn unto God, and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance*; I cannot think of a more proper subject to edify both you and myself, than to consider, *what it is which hinders men's repentance and conversion*, and makes them generally so unwilling to set about a work, which every body acknowledges to be so very necessary; that knowing the *causes of our impenitency*, we may, in good earnest, strive to remove them, and prevent that ruin which will most certainly follow, if we are NOT converted, and if our sins are not blotted out. Or, in the words of the text, "Let us lay aside every weight," all worldly and carnal considerations, "and the sin that does so easily beset us;" that which does most hinder our conversion; "and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." And that we may be encouraged to do so, let us "look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right-hand of the throne of God;"—whose example, if any thing, will engage us to set about the work of our salvation with patience and perseverance.

I. But first, we must lay aside *every weight*, whatever may hinder our conversion.

Now, the first and great occasion of impenitency which offers itself to our consideration is, *the little regard which Christians have for their souls, and consequently for that religion which alone can save their souls from ruin.*

Men put little or no value upon Christianity, because it cost them nothing to be made Christians. They found themselves intitled to all its blessings as soon as they knew that they had been baptized. And very often they are no farther concerned to

ask, what the Christian religion requires of its professors, or what they shall lose by not minding its precepts. And what is the end of this? Why, very—very many leave the world without ever knowing why they came into it; and are gone into eternity without ever seriously considering what must become of them for ever.

This is a consideration so afflicting, that one cannot take too much pains to free Christians from a weight which will certainly sink them into endless misery, if it be not laid aside in time.

You will not meet with many people who will say, that they do not value the happiness of Heaven, or the miseries of hell;—but one may meet with very many, who must own, that they seldom lay seriously to heart either the value of the one, or the danger of the other; that is, they seldom or never think of them. And so in truth, (though they dare not say so) they neither value the happiness of Heaven, nor fear the miseries of hell; yea, though they profess to believe both the one and the other.

Christians will hardly believe this; but let us make the experiment:—Let a man, for example, ask himself, What is it I most value? Why, to be sure, that which takes up most of my thoughts and time. And is not that the little affairs which concern the body, and this life, only? Does my concern for my soul bear any proportion to the value God has put upon it, who gave his only Son for its redemption;—or to the value which Jesus Christ has put upon it, who bids us "fear not them which kill the body," (for that must die of itself in a very little time) "but rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul to all eternity?" But how can I be said to fear God above all things, when I take no care

<sup>1</sup> See Isaiah liii. 11.

Matth. v. 29.



to obey his laws? How can I be said to value my soul more than my life, when I perform all the duties of religion with the greatest indifferency, as if it were a matter of no moment, whether God were pleased or displeased with my service?

Now, any Christian may very easily know whether he is not one of these careless people, who having no fear, no concern for their souls, have no thoughts of repentance, and therefore ought to have no hopes of salvation, until they become better disposed.

For instance:—A Christian who does not firmly believe another life;—that what the Gospel saith of that life is most certainly true, That men shall be rewarded or punished hereafter, just as they have behaved themselves here,—and that without a timely repentance no man can be saved. Till a man is firmly persuaded of these things, and thinks of them with seriousness, all the arguments in the world will not prevail with him to set about the duty of repentance.

I know what will be said:—*That all Christians believe these truths.* I am afraid they do not. I am sure they do not attend to them: for, If a man lives in known sin;—if he does not care to be informed concerning his duty;—if he does not see the necessity of an holy life;—if he neglects to pray for God's grace, or prays for it after such a manner as shews that he does not know the danger of wanting it;—if a man lives in the world as if there were nothing to be feared, no enemies, no temptations to be met with;—if a man will not deny himself when he is told by our Lord Jesus Christ, "that no man can be his disciple who will not deny himself:"—In one word, if a man is not awed by the fear of hell, or moved by the hopes of Heaven, but lives in a general neglect of religion and duty,—it is certain he does not believe the truths of the Gospel, though he should repeat the Creed every day.

And this, as we said before, is one of the greatest hindrances to repentance. People do not see the danger they are in, because they do not heartily believe the Gospel, and because they do not know that they are under God's displeasure. They do not apprehend that they are in the way of perdition.

This is one of those *weights* which men must lay aside, before they can think of a change.

They may be exhorted to repent, and they may be prevailed on to shew some outward signs of repentance; but a change for the better will never follow, until they are awakened into a true sense of the danger their souls are in, both on account of original sin, and the many actual transgressions of their

lives. And if a Christian will not put to his own helping hand, in order to the laying aside this weight, his case will be desperate, and he will certainly be ruined.

My meaning is:—Before a man can set about the work of repentance in good earnest, he must beg of God to open his eyes, that he may see the wretched condition he is in, and feel the disorders to which he is by nature subject, until he cry out with David, "Mine iniquities are as an heavy burthen, they are too heavy for me."

When once God has awakened a sinner into a just sense of his condition and danger, he will not, he cannot be at rest, until he has made his peace with God by a true repentance.

II. But this is not the only thing which hinders men from setting about the duty of repentance. There is another very common cause, and that is, a *carnal security*, or a presumption that one's condition is safer than indeed it is.

Most Christians are apt to think, that there is nothing easier than to be happy when they die. It is probable they will have other thoughts when they come to die. In the mean time, it is this presumption which very much hinders people from repenting, from *turning unto God*, and from *bringing forth fruits meet for repentance*.

They depend upon their Christian name;—they depend upon a few outward observances;—they go to church, but not out of a sense of their dependance upon God, but out of custom, or some worse motive;—they abstain from many sins, not out of a reverence for the Law of God, which has forbid them, but because they are scandalous in the eye of the world, or because they would be punished by the magistrate;—they depend upon *the infinite goodness and mercy of God*, not considering, that the goodness of God ought to lead men to repentance; and that where it does not do so, "his anger will smoke against that man;—and all the curses that are written in the Law of God shall light upon him."

Nay, there are very many who make their minds easy, because they are no worse than others, who yet hope to be saved;—and when they are exhorted to repent, they begin to compare lives with those about them; never laying it to heart, that it will neither be excuse nor comfort to any man that millions are undone besides himself.

Now, this *presumption*, that a man is not in any great danger, because he performs some outward duties of religion, and because he is not profligately wicked; this, I

\* Ps. xxxviii. 4.    <sup>1</sup> Deut. xxix. 20.



say, hinders the conversion of an infinite number of people; it is a weight that must be removed before men can think of repentance.

Notorious sinners know very well, that there is no manner of hopes for them without a change; and sometimes they are uneasy under the guilt of sin, and there is some hope that this uneasiness will make them in time think of repentance:—But Christians who are easy because they are not scandalously wicked, or because they do some things which the Christian religion requires of them, such people seldom think of a change till it is too late, and very often die unconverted.

Now, in order to remove this dead weight, we should all seriously consider,—That we are by nature born in sin, and the children of wrath;—that the design of religion is to restore us to God's favour, by making us such as will please him;—that nothing but a sincere endeavour after holiness will please God;—that religion cannot consist in any thing which an unconverted man can do as well as one who is converted;—that therefore going to church, to the sacrament, fasting, and alms-deeds, are not at all pleasing to God, —unless we pray out of a real sense of our wants, and dependance upon God,—unless we receive the sacrament as a means whereby we may obtain the grace of God for the pardon of our sins past, and for the amendment of our lives for the future,—unless we fast to punish ourselves for the sins we have committed, and that we may get the mastery over our corrupt affections,—and unless we give alms in obedience to the command of Christ, *that we may obtain mercy at the hands of God, and that God may bless us in all our works*:—Unless, I say, we do these and other Christian duties out of a sense of our unworthiness, to the glory of God, and that we may thereby become better men, and better Christians, and more fit for Heaven, all our religion will signify nothing;—for nothing but holiness will please God, and save us from ruin.

III. There is, *thirdly*, another thing which hinders our repentance and conversion, and that is, *the difficulty of the work*.

Christians are certainly in the right, in believing that there is a great deal of difficulty in forsaking of evil habits, and in becoming virtuous. But if there is trouble in these, it is sure much less than *to dwell with everlasting blessings*, which must be the portion of all those who will not forsake the pleasures of sin, that they may attain such virtues as may fit them for Heaven.

But after all, it is only the slothful man that saith, “There is a lion in the way, a

“lion in the streets;” the most unlikely place, one would think, to meet with a lion. The truth is, when people have no mind to reform, any thing in the world will be pretence enough to hinder them from setting about the work.

But then let it be considered, that most people, some time of their lives, are convinced, that though true repentance be a very difficult work, yet that it is both necessary and in their power, by God's assistance, to go through with it. Why else do we hear Christians so often, when they are under apprehensions of death, or when their consciences are awake, cry out—I will defer my repentance no longer;—by God's grace, if he spares my life, I will become a new man;—by his assistance I will break off all my evil habits, though never so deeply rooted;—nothing shall hinder me from so necessary a work?

Why now, Christians would never speak at this rate, if they were not persuaded, that by the grace of God they could overcome the greatest difficulties. And indeed so they can, provided they would in good earnest resolve to repent, and sincerely ask God's assistance. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me,” saith the Apostle.<sup>m</sup> And our blessed Lord gives the true reason why men perish in their impenitency: “Ye will not come unto me, that ye might have life.”<sup>n</sup>

Jesus Christ does indeed intimate unto us the difficulty of repentance and a new life, when he commands us,<sup>o</sup> “If thy right hand offend thee,” that is, hinder thy conversion, or cause thee to offend, “cut it off;” but then he would never have given this direction, but that he knew we might do it by his gracious assistance, provided we ask it in sincerity. And when he assures us,<sup>p</sup> that “straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto life, and few there be that go in thereat;” it is not to discourage us from striving to attain eternal life, but to shew us the necessity of doing it with care and concern,—of begging God's grace constantly, —and of avoiding every thing that may hinder us in the race that is set before us.

IV. I shall only mention one other hindrance of men's repentance and conversion, and that is, *The hopes of repenting some time or other before they die, and so for the present laying aside the thoughts of it to any good purposes*.

Now, that this is a very great delusion, and the loss of infinite souls, is plain from hence,—That Christians trust to that which is not in their own power;—they depend upon God's goodness, and that he will here-

<sup>m</sup> Phil. iv. 13. <sup>n</sup> John v. 40. <sup>o</sup> Matth. v. 30. <sup>p</sup> Matth. vii. 13.



after dispose their hearts more strongly to repentance; that is, They hope that God will be more merciful, the more he is provoked;—they depend upon a life, which they own to be uncertain;—they depend upon a death, which will give them timely warning to make their peace with God;—and lastly, they depend upon a death-bed repentance, which no man can assure them will be accepted of God.

Now, would any man in his senses trust his soul to such uncertainties? Would any man put off his repentance from time to time, who finds by experience, that the longer he defers it, the more unwilling he still is to set about it? Would any man, who believes the Gospel, and that repentance and amendment of life are necessary to salvation, make these the *least* and the *last* of his thoughts and business?

And now, good Christians, I have told you what are the things which generally hinder our conversion:—We are called upon by the Church, and by Jesus Christ, to repent, and to turn unto God; and we find in ourselves no inclination to do so. I have shewed you the causes of this indifference, that you may lay aside every weight, every thing, that may hinder you from beginning a new life. I have shewed you, that if Christians live in sins unrepented of, it is either because they have little or no regard for their souls;—or they fancy their condition is better than really it is, because of some outward duties of religion which they perform;—or they are frightened by the difficulties of a Christian life;—or lastly, they

resolve to repent when they have a more convenient season.

I might use a great many words to persuade you, that none of these things ought to hinder your conversion; but I need not. Your own reason and consciences will tell you,—That we ought to be more concerned for what will become of us when we die, than for any thing that can befall us in this world;—that nothing but holiness and righteousness, or a life agreeable to the Laws of God, can make us fit for Heaven;—that no difficulties ought to affright us where Almighty God promises to assist us;—and lastly, that if we repent not now, it is very uncertain whether or not we shall ever repent.

A Christian, who is convinced of the truth of these things, will not, cannot be at rest, till he has removed whatever may hinder his conversion. He will fall upon his knees, and beg of God to give him all the graces preparatory to a true repentance; which are, A serious concern for our souls,—an humble opinion of ourselves,—an entire confidence in God's power and goodness to help such as flee to him for succour;—and lastly, a firm resolution to do the work in its season which God has appointed us; that is, to turn unto God, and do works meet for repentance, “before the night cometh when no man can work.”

May the good Lord give unto us all these holy dispositions, that, by a true and timely repentance, we may make our peace with God, and be made by him eternally happy, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## S E R M O N LXV.

PREACHED ON PALM SUNDAY.

THE SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST PRACTICALLY EXPLAINED AND APPLIED.

I C O R. ii. 2.

*I determined not to know any thing among you, save JESUS CHRIST, and him crucified.*

THIS was the foundation of all St. Paul's sermons, as it ought to be of ours: This being the power of God, and the wisdom of God, to regain the world out of the hands of Satan, and to save souls from eternal ruin.

Every one of the Apostles and Evangelists, who have written our Lord's life, have given us a very particular account of the

manner of his *evil treatment*, his *sufferings*, and of his *death*. Now, these are all read in the daily service of this week, as full of instructions, and proper to prepare us for the Blessed Sacrament appointed to be administered on Sunday next. Whereby we learn what our Lord suffered, in order to obtain our pardon, and to restore us to the mercy and favour of our offended God.

<sup>1</sup> See Luke xxiv. 46. Acts xvii. 3. Rom. iv. 25. vi. 3, 5. 1 Cor. i. 23. xv. 3. 2 Cor. v. 15. 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. Gal. vi. 14. Col. iii. 1, 2. Phil. iii. 10.

When



When you hear the Gospels read,—how our Blessed Lord was betrayed, and used, and crucified, by the merciless Jews,—you are naturally led to wonder and blame that people's *malice*, their *wickedness*, and *injustice*.

For example:—

When we are informed, that one of his disciples, who had been with him for so long a time, had seen his miracles, and heard his blessed discourses, could be tempted to betray him for any consideration whatever;—That so great a number of men of learning, and supposed piety, should meet and contrive how to take away the life of an innocent person,—to encourage false witnesses,—and to persuade the people to pray for the life of a murderer, instead of the life of one who had done so much good among them:—Then we are led to blame his Judge, who had declared over and over again, that he found no fault in him, and yet at last condemned him:—And lastly, we are amazed that any people could be so cruelly barbarous, as to mock a man, and use him so spitefully, who had never done them harm, and at a time when his life was at stake, or when he was suffering a most painful death.

These, I say, are the thoughts which are most in our minds when we read the mournful account of our Saviour's sufferings.

After all,

This was not the great design of leaving these things upon record;—but to let us see what treatment our sins deserve;—how abominable sin is in the sight of an holy and just God, who suffered his own Son to be thus treated, when he had put himself in the place of sinners, in order to procure their pardon;—and lastly, to convince sinners what *they must* expect whose sins are not pardoned by the merits and sufferings of Jesus Christ.

These, I say, and such thoughts as these, should be in our minds when we read or hear the circumstances of our Saviour's sufferings; which I am now going to set before you, for your edification.

The leading men of the Jews, having been often reproved by our Lord for their errors, their pride, their hypocrisy, and other vices, were resolved to take the first fair opportunity to put him to death. Now Satan very soon offered them this opportunity;—for Judas, having been reproved by our Lord for his covetousness, and for envying the loss, as he thought it, of some valuable ointment which a pious woman had poured on our Saviour's head and feet; Satan put it into his heart to betray his master to his enemies, for which he received a sum of money.

See what covetousness and resentment will lead men to,—even to the greatest sin that ever was committed by man!

Our Blessed Lord foresaw all this, and retired with his disciples into a garden, to prepare himself for that usage and death which he saw approaching. In this place his mind was struck with something so terrible, that he declared that his soul was sore troubled, even to death.—What it was that amazed him, and made him so exceeding sorrowful, no mortal man can tell. We can only be sure it was something dreadful beyond imagination, since it forced him to sweat great drops of blood falling to the ground.

In this distress and agony our Lord has taught us, how to behave under the greatest afflictions; and especially when our death approaches:—To beg of God to deliver us from all our spiritual enemies,—to send his Angels to strengthen us,—and at the same time to submit ourselves entirely to God's will and disposal in the very words of Jesus Christ, *not my will, but thine be done*.

And now, our Lord, knowing that it was God's will that he should die, went to meet those that came to take him. Judas was their leader, who, that they might not mistake their man in the dark, went to Jesus, and, as he had promised them, kissed him. This our Lord suffered with patience;—which will be an everlasting reproach and condemnation to such as pretend to be his followers, and yet will not bear the sight of one that hath offended them.

While the rest were going to seize him, Peter drew his sword to defend his Lord and Master from the rude multitude, which his Lord would not suffer, telling him, that if he had a mind to escape their hands, God, upon his prayer, could send him twelve legions of angels, instead of his twelve disciples, to rescue him out of their hands.

He is now led as a sheep to the slaughter.—Let us follow him in our minds and spirits, and we shall see what treatment (as we are sinners) every soul of us deserves.

And first, they bind him as a malefactor, then lead him to the high-priest's palace, where, even before he is tried, he suffers all the scorn, and contempt, and ill-usage, that a rude and barbarous people could put upon him. To add to his trouble, *now*, all his disciples had forsaken him, for fear of the like evil usage.

All the Priests and Rulers being met in council, and having sought for false witnesses, such as might take away his life, they set him before them; and the witnesses not agreeing together, at last the High-priest adjured him, by the living God, to say whether



ther he was the MESSIAH, *the Son of the most High God?* Jesus could not deny it, though his life was at stake, but said, I AM. The High-priest then declared, that he had spoken blasphemy; and they all agreed that he was guilty of death. After this, shall we, any of us, complain of injustice, when the innocence of Christ could not escape?

It was now they used our Lord after a manner the most outrageous. They spit in his face, they smote him, they blindfolded him, and bade him prophesy who smote him;—all which he bore with the greatest meekness and patience, because he was in the place of sinners, who really deserve such treatment: And yet sinners themselves, even they that pretend to be his followers, think they ought never to forgive far less injuries than these.

After this, we have a sad instance of human frailty when left to itself:—St. Peter had declared, over and over again, that *he would lay down his life for his Master*; but when he saw his Master in this danger, and was charged with being one of his disciples, he denied it after a manner the most weak and scandalous.—This ought to be a warning to the best of us, not to trust in ourselves, without the grace and help of God, which we ought never to forget to pray for.

Our Lord indeed had pity on him, (otherwise he might have gone the length of Judas' sin;) the Cock had spoken to his outward ears without any effect, till Jesus, with a most gracious and powerful look, touched his heart with a true sense of his crime, and melted it into tears of repentance. May the same eye of mercy look upon us whenever we shall do amiss, that we may be sensible of our fault, and return out of the way of ruin!

And now the whole multitude arose, and led him to Pilate; and there they accused our Lord of treason, sedition, and blasphemy. Pilate found all this to be the mere effect of *malice and envy*, and declared, over and over again, *that he found no fault in him*. But that would not satisfy the Jews. Pilate, still unwilling to condemn an innocent man against his conscience, orders our Lord to be scourged till he was covered with blood, hoping this would move their compassion, and that he would not deserve, nor they desire, a greater punishment.—But all this would not do with people who were under the power of Satan. *Behold*, saith he, *the man!* Is there any fear that he can hurt you?

The Jews indeed were not moved with this sad sight;—but every Christian ought to be moved with it, and to beg of God to look upon his Son thus used, and to pardon

our offences, which were indeed the cause of all the torments he endured, and which the best of us have deserved.

The Chief Priest and Elders still persisted in their demand to have him crucified, and told the Judge, he was not the Emperor's friend, if he released the prisoner.—This awakened his fears; and after having washed his hands, and declared, that he was innocent of the blood of that just person, he condemned him to be crucified, against all justice, against all law, and against his conscience. When he declared himself innocent of Christ's blood, the Jews cried out, "His blood be upon us and our children;"—and so it is to this day. For though it was for our sins his blood was shed, yet their crime was exceeding great, as appeared by the punishment it brought upon them, in the destruction of *their temple, their city, their nation, and themselves*.

In this unhappy people, let us see the sad effects of malice and envy, and the power of the devil over such as give way to these vices. They had long expected the Messiah as the great blessing promised by God unto their nation, and when he came they murdered him;—they abhorred the government of the Romans, and now declare that they would have *no King but Caesar*.

When Judas saw what his wickedness ended in, he repented of what he had done, went to those that had hired him, flung down his wages, and confessed his crime. Pray take notice of their answer:—"What is that to us? See thou to that."—This, God knows, is too often the case of others, who, after they have drawn men into sin, seldom or never trouble themselves with what must follow, or how to recover them out of it.

And now our Lord, the same day he was condemned, was carried out to be crucified; though, by the Tiberian law, there ought to have been ten days betwixt the sentence and execution.

The cross, as the manner was, was put upon him to bear it, but fainting under the burthen, it was laid upon another to bear it after him. And while they that followed him lamented his sad fate, he assured them that they had more need to weep for themselves and their children, for the miseries that were coming upon them;—for *if*, saith he, *the green tree, which is not fit to burn, be thus dealt with, what will become of the dry?* that is, if innocent men be thus dealt with, what will be the punishment of the wicked?

And now our Lord is nailed to the cross, to suffer the most lingering and painful death;—and placed betwixt two thieves, to make him still more contemptible. These people not



not knowing, which they should have done, that the Messiah, according to their own Scriptures, was to be *numbered with the transgressors*.

Let us now, for a few minutes, suppose ourselves at the foot of the Cross, and Jesus Christ speaking to us after this manner:—  
‘It is for you, and on your account, that I undergo these pains and these indignities;—to make an atonement for your sins;—to obtain your pardon, that you may not suffer eternal torments;—and that, being again reconciled to God, and restored to his favour, you may for ever enjoy that happiness for which you were at first created.’

Let us consider what ought to be the answer of every Christian that has any sense of gratitude and concern for his soul:—‘I abhor that sin for which you are so kind and merciful as to die.—I am astonished at the Love of God, who did not overlook lost mankind, (for ever blessed be his holy name!) but sent *you* his only Son, to redeem us,—to redeem and save us from ruin, even when we were your Father’s enemies. I shall be the most ungrateful creature, if I do not abhor and forsake those sins, which could not be forgiven without so great a sacrifice.—And the sacrifice being so infinitely great, I will depend upon it for the pardon of all my sins, though never so many and great.’

Such as these should be the thought and purposes of every Christian, when he goes to the Lord’s Table, to call to mind what Jesus Christ has done and suffered for us.

But let us return again to the Cross; where we shall find a superscription written in *Greek*, in *Hebrew*, and in *Latin*, **THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS**;—that all the world, being concerned in his death, might read and see who he was, how wrongfully he suffered;—might enquire into the cause of his sufferings, that they might look upon him in spirit, and be healed and freed from death, as the Israelites were by looking upon the brazen serpent in the wilderness:—So the providence of God ordered it.

And now, to add to his afflictions, the Rulers and Chief Priests mocked and reviled him in these words:—‘He trusted in God, let him deliver him now if he will have him; for he said he was the Son of God.’ This was a judicial blindness indeed;—that they should use the very words that the Spirit of God had, in their own Scriptures, foretold would be said to him whose hands and feet should be pierced.—Amazing blindness! that they could not see, that they themselves were fulfilling that prophecy of the Messiah.

• Isaiah liii. • Ps. xxii. 8.

Others railed upon him, and said, ‘He saved others, himself he cannot save;’—  
‘Let him come down from the Cross, and we will believe him to be the King of the Jews.’

What blind and ignorant creatures we are when left to ourselves!—These people did not consider, *that faith is the gift of God*, without which all the miracles in the world will not make us believe what we have no mind to believe.

To add still to his affliction, the very malefactors, one of them at least, reviled him;—the other, his heart being touched by the all-powerful Spirit of Christ, acknowledged his sins, and had the comfortable assurance of a pardon.

By these two instances we may receive instruction;—by one of them, to be careful and afraid to continue in sin till we come to die, lest we provoke God to leave us to ourselves, for then we shall never repent, never be saved;—the other may preserve the greatest sinners from utter despair, for we do not know how far God’s mercy may extend.

And indeed God makes use of a thousand ways and means to awaken and convert such sinners as have not hardened their hearts against all conviction;—for at this time a dreadful darkness on a sudden overspread the sky;—an earthquake rent the very rocks of the place,—and the great vail of their temple was torn from top to bottom.

Many, indeed, were affected with these wonderful things, and smote their breasts, expecting some severe judgments for the injustice done to a righteous man:—Even the Centurion, an heathen, was one who gave glory to God on this occasion:—Others were hardened. So unsearchable are the judgments of God!

Our Lord, in the midst of his torments, shewed his infinite love for sinners, and prayed for them,—‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ And for our comfort, we are sure, that even now he pleads in Heaven for every poor sinner, who, for his sake, begs of God for pardon, and for grace to lead a godly life.

The exquisite pains our Lord had so long endured forced him at last to cry out, **MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?** Which should convince all sinners, all mankind, in whose place he then was,—*that they deserve to be forsaken of God*;—and that they will be forsaken, and for ever lost, if they do not close with this mercy of Christ, in suffering for all those who will repent and turn to God, and, through faith in his blood, beg of God the pardon



pardon of their sins, and live like people whom Jesus Christ has redeemed from eternal death and misery.

And now, our Saviour said aloud, IT IS FINISHED;—that is, I have now undergone and performed all that I was to do, in order to atone for the sins of the world;—and so gave up the Ghost.

You have now, Christians, seen the manner of our Saviour's sufferings. This will be of very little service to us, if we do not know and lay to heart the reasons of his death and sufferings; as also, what will be required *on our part* to make them the greatest blessing to us that God can give to his sinful creatures.

Now, it concerns every soul of us, more than our lives are worth, to know the reasons of these sufferings of Christ which we have been setting before you.

It would be but small comfort for a sinner to know and believe in a God infinitely holy, just, and powerful, and who hates all iniquity, did we not know he is to be appeased when offended.

Now, this is the case of every man living, without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and what he has done for us. And, indeed, no thoughtful man can have any true peace in his soul, till he has, by a true knowledge and faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, secured, in some good measure, his peace with God. He will then, and not till then, see the blessing of a Redeemer,—who can make his peace with God,—who has obtained his pardon for what is past, and can enable him to escape for the time to come.

Now this, Jesus Christ has done and obtained for us by his sufferings and death. He hath reconciled us to God his Father;—he hath obtained for us, that a sincere repentance shall be accepted instead of a perfect obedience;—and that our sincere endeavour to please God shall be accepted, and even rewarded. At the same time he hath made known to us this awakening truth,—that if we sin wilfully, when we know this, and do not repent, and bring forth fruits meet for repentance, we shall perish, and that for ever.

It is but too plain, by the practice of Christians, such as they are, that they do not look upon sin as so hateful to God, and dangerous to themselves, as it really is, and therefore they sin without fear;—whereas sin ought to be dreaded more than death, because it leads to a second death—even to death eternal.

And every man, who will lay any thing seriously to heart, will be convinced of this, when he remembers how severely the first

sins that ever were committed by angels or men were punished by an offended God; the one, that of angels, with no less a loss than the loss of Heaven; and the other, the sin of Adam, with the loss of Paradise.

But above all, the sufferings of Jesus Christ discover to us the dreadful nature of sin, and that God cannot but be exceedingly offended with it, since his justice required such an atonement. That therefore Christians, above all men, ought to hate it, and fear every degree of it, as they hope for any benefit from the sufferings of Christ,—the great design of which was to redeem us:—As how? Why, the Apostle will shew you,—by redeeming us from sin, and by purifying to himself a peculiar people, a generation of men freed from the pollutions of this wicked world, and zealous of good works.

Now, if, through our own fault, the death of Christ has not this effect upon us, we are still under the power of Satan, under the bondage of sin, and utterly incapable of eternal life and happiness.

In the next place, let us remember, that the sacrifice that was offered for us was the Lamb, the Son of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. This is such an assurance to all those who close with this mercy, that God will be reconciled to them, that an angel from Heaven, sent to every one of us, could not give us a greater assurance or comfort, that our sins upon our true repentance will be forgiven, and our pardon sealed in Heaven.

Let us therefore, whenever the memorial of the death of Christ is celebrated in the Lord's Supper;—let us be careful, by faith, to apply it to ourselves, and be qualified to do so by a due preparation, each of us saying in his heart, 'This body and blood were given and shed for me. The Minister of God assures me of it, and I do faithfully trust in it.'

It was for this reason that Jesus Christ ordained that Holy Sacrament, That we might be often obliged to remember his love for us,—his bitter sufferings,—the occasion of his death,—the misery we have thereby escaped, if it be not our own fault,—and the happiness he has obtained for us;—that we may be obliged, by all the motives of interest and gratitude, to love him with all our heart and soul, and to put our whole trust in his mercy.

Then will our own death, whenever it shall happen, be a blessing to us, and better than the day of our birth, when nothing in this world can be a comfort to us, but a firm faith in Jesus Christ, and what he has done and suffered for our salvation.

We



We shall then see the importance of a true faith, and set a true value upon the blood of Christ, when every thing else will yield us no substantial comfort; when we can say with the Apostle, *I know in whom I have believed*, even in the Son of God, who came to seek and to save lost sinners, and who gave his life to redeem them from the second death.

In this faith, and with these hopes, every good Christian will cheerfully submit to death in union with that of Jesus Christ, whose dying words, God grant that I myself, and every soul here present, may so live, as to have reason to make use of; INTO THY HANDS I COMMEND MY SPIRIT; for thou hast redeemed me, O Lord, thou God of truth!

But then let us ever remember, that whoever would thus resign his life, who hopes to die in *peace*, and rest in *hope*, and rise in *glory*, must endeavour through his grace to follow his blessed steps, take up his cross, and follow his example, or he will be dreadfully disappointed.

And now, Christians, you see the wisdom of that church of which you are all members, in giving us an occasion of so often laying before God the great passages of *his* Son, and *our* blessed Saviour's life and death, to plead our pardon and deliverance from eternal death,—by his fasting and temptation,—by his agony and bloody sweat,—by his cross and passion,—by his precious death and burial;—the great causes of our redemption from eternal death.

To conclude:—We have the Son of God for our Redeemer,—for our example,—for our King to protect us,—for our Prophet to teach us the way of salvation,—for our Priest to intercede with God for us:—What can we desire more?—Yes, O Jesus, this one thing we desire and beg, that we may have the grace which Thou alone canst obtain for us, that we may have the grace to lay these things to heart, and that our lives may be answerable to what we profess to believe, that we may love and bless Thee to all eternity. *Amen. Amen.*

## S E R M O N LXVI.

### THE SUFFERINGS AND DEATH OF CHRIST NECESSARY FOR THE SALVATION OF THE WORLD.

LUKE XXIV. 46.

*Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.*

EVERY Christian, that is not well instructed in the principles of Christianity, cannot choose but wonder why God should suffer his own beloved Son to be so barbarously used, to be exposed to so much *shame*, and *scorn*, and *pain*, and to the greatest *abuses*, and after all, to a most *cruel death*; and that this his Son would suffer all this, when it was in his power to have hindered it;—for, as he himself declares, he could have had twelve legions of angels, instead of twelve disciples, to have taken him out of the hands of his murderers, if he had pleased.

This must needs be a wonder to all such as know not the reason of all this; as we have reason to fear *too many do not*. But Christ himself assures us, in the words of the text, that it was *requisite*, that it was *necessary*, he should do so; for that God had so decreed it;—that his justice required it;—for that the whole race of men would be lost for ever, if he did not satisfy the justice of God for their sins, and restore them to his favour, by suffering what they had de-

served to suffer for their manifold transgressions. For this reason *it behoved him to suffer*;—forasmuch as he had put himself in the place and stead of sinners, and had taken upon himself to answer for *their* offences, and to satisfy the justice of his offended Father.

Now, the knowledge of this great mystery being the very foundation of the Christian Religion, and of all our hopes of salvation, I will endeavour, through the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, to explain it to the very meanest capacity, (of every one that understands me) and I hope you will attend to what I am going to say, with a seriousness which such a subject certainly requires.

In the first place, we none of us need to be convinced, that *we*, and all mankind, are sinners; that is, there is not one of us who have not broken the commands of God, which must be very displeasing to a most *holy*, *good*, and *just* Being. And every considering person cannot but be afraid for himself, who knows, and is assured, that this holy



holy and just Being has declared, that he *must* and *will* punish sinners, as they shall deserve.

What must a sinner do in this case? What of all things in this world would a sinner, whose conscience is awake, most earnestly wish for?—I will take upon me to tell you what such a person would above all things desire. He would desire, that God, whom he had so greatly offended, and who had threatened to punish offenders, would pardon the many offences that he had been guilty of;—and in the next place, that God would enable him, for the time to come, so to live as that he might not offend him any more.

This, indeed, is not what every sinner desires, (would to God it were!) but this is what every thoughtful person, whose conscience is truly awakened by the fear of God's judgments against sinners, cannot but wish for above all things in this world, *that God would forgive him his past offences; and enable him not to offend him for the time to come.*

Now, these two most invaluable favours, Jesus Christ has purchased for us by his death. He laid down his life to obtain our pardon; and he has sent down his all-powerful Spirit to assist us to mend our corrupt nature.

How our nature came to be so corrupt, we have an account in the third chapter of Genesis;—how the first parents of mankind rebelled against their Maker's command;—how they were punished for their disobedience;—how the merciful God accepted of his Son's intercession, that so great a part of his creation might not be for ever lost;—and, lastly, how these parents of mankind left a generation behind them like themselves, corrupt, and prone to evil.

This was the case of man, when the Son of God took our nature upon him, in order to redeem mankind at the price of his own blood. For this he had engaged to do: To take the nature of men upon him, that as a man he might make satisfaction to God for the offences of sinful men, and suffer every thing that they had deserved to suffer, even death itself;—and by this most kind, most merciful undertaking, we, and all mankind, are restored to the favour of God, and have a right given us to eternal life and happiness, if we are not wanting to ourselves.

And now, Christians, you see why God would suffer his own Son to be put to death by wicked men;—and why his Son would choose to be so punished. It was because he had undertaken the cause of sinners, and had put himself in their room, and place, and stead; and therefore was in justice bound to suffer what they as sinners had

deserved, and were obliged in justice to undergo, in order to satisfy the justice of his offended Father, who therefore suffered his Son to be so treated and put to death.

This you will find was manifested in all our Saviour's whole life and sufferings: For he took upon himself the condition of a servant;—he was born of a poor Virgin;—he wanted at his birth the very necessities of poverty;—he was forced to flee for his life into Egypt as soon almost as born. When he was grown up, and appeared in the world, he was treated with the most opprobrious language, and had not where to lay his head. And all this he was to undergo, not only to convince mankind what they as sinners do deserve, but also to satisfy the justice of God.

But this will appear still more plain, when we consider the last part of his life. And here I shall have a very good occasion to explain to you several passages of the Gospels relating to our Saviour. His being *betrayed, tried, condemned, and crucified*; which will be well worth your knowing and remembering; and by which you will be convinced, that the sufferings of Christ were all foreknown and determined by God.

For example:—Jesus Christ having, for our sakes, taken upon him the form (the condition) of a servant, he was to be treated as such; and therefore Judas and the Jews could agree upon no other sum for betraying and selling his Master, but just thirty pieces of silver, which was just the price of a servant, as we find in the law of Moses.\*

And here one cannot pass by observing, how little those that tempt others to wickedness are concerned for what follows. Judas, his eyes being opened, was overwhelmed with horror at what he had done, and flung back the money they had given him, declaring that he had betrayed the innocent blood. This mournful confession, and sad affliction, never moved them. All they answered was,—“What is that to us? See *thou* to that.”

Little do people fear the sin of *covetousness*; and yet here we find it the occasion of one of the greatest crimes that ever was committed; so true it is, THAT THE LOVE OF MONEY IS THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL.

To proceed:—When Judas betrayed him, Jesus Christ did not so much as upbraid him;—when false witnesses were set up to take away his life, he did not so much as once complain of the injustice; for he had put himself in the place of guilty sinners, and therefore took patiently the worst of usage.

Of this patience we have a memorable instance in a circumstance which attended

\* Exod. xxi. 32.



his examination by the Chief Priest; for when one smote him on the face, and rebuked him, he answered with the utmost mildness, "If I have done evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?"—How different was this from what St. Paul answered, when the High Priest commanded him to be smitten on the face; "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall! For fittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?"

Upon Pilate's declaring, over and over again, that he found no fault in Christ;—that he had done nothing worthy of death; and for his part he would wash his hands, that he might be clear of the blood of so just a man;—the Jews, with one voice, cried out, "His blood be upon us and upon our children;"—and so it is to this day. They are a people dispersed over the whole world, and treated with contempt wherever they go.

But his righteous blood was required of them in a most signal and dreadful manner, within forty years after they so unjustly crucified the Son of God; and at the very time of the Passover, when their city was besieged, and when no less than eleven hundred thousand were slain at one time. And Pilate, the unrighteous Judge, who had both acquitted and condemned the Lord Christ, by a righteous judgment of God, was soon after called from his government and banished, and within four or five years hanged himself out of despair.

But even after our Lord was condemned, he was used worse than the most notorious criminals are ever used, or suffered to be treated. They spit in his face, and buffeted him; they crowned him with a crown of thorns, and so led him out to crucify him. Why was all this suffered by God his Father? Was it not to shew mankind, that as sinners, nobody can use us worse than we deserve, and that *he*, having put himself in the place of sinful men, must of necessity suffer after this manner? For so the Prophet Isaiah had foretold, no less than seven hundred years before, that the Messiah should be so used, in these words, "He was" (that is, *he was to be*) "despised, and rejected of men. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth. But he was wounded for our transgressions, and with his stripes we are healed. For the Lord laid on him the iniquities of us all." Thus it was written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer.

And now he was led out to be crucified. And here pray let us observe the providence of God. He was carried to be crucified to a

mountain called *Calvary*, that is, a place of a skull, from an old tradition that Adam was there buried. But whether that was so or not, this we are sure of, that this was the very mountain Moriah, where Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his only, his beloved Son; who was to be a type or figure of Jesus Christ. And the Prophet having foretold that the Messiah was to be numbered with the transgressors,\* the Jews, not knowing what they did, fulfilled that prophecy, and crucified him between two thieves. So wonderfully surprising are all the ways of God, and ordered for the confirmation of our faith and trust in Jesus Christ!

He is now upon the Cross, his hands and his feet nailed to it. One would think that their envy and malice was now satisfied:—But there were other prophecies to be fulfilled. The Prophet David had said in the person of the Messiah,† "They pierced my hands and my feet;" and, that he who was to be so used, "should be laughed to scorn in the midst of his sufferings;"—that they should say in scorn, "he trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him; let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." Let us observe how this prophecy was most exactly fulfilled:—The Chief Priests and the Rulers mocked him and said, "He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the Son of God, let him deliver him," &c. What use are we to make of this strange blindness of this people? Why, we may see, in the perverse blindness of the Jews, what we ourselves should be, and what we should do, if we, for our sins, were forsaken of God, and left to ourselves.

The sufferings of Christ were now so extremely great, that he was forced to cry out, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me!"—These are the very words of the twenty-second Psalm, which the Prophet David foreshewed would be made use of by him who was thus to suffer,—that we may see that every sinner, in whose place Christ then was, does deserve to be forsaken of God, and would be so forsaken, if Christ had not thus suffered for him.

When God appointed the Passover, in order to keep up the remembrance of this people's deliverance out of the bondage of Egypt, which was also to be a type or figure of a greater deliverance by Jesus Christ, he ordered, *that a bone of the Lamb that was sacrificed should not be broken.*

Observe now the wonderful order of providence:—There was a great man of the Jews, who had begged of Pilate the body of Christ. Pilate marvelled, if he were al-

\* Chap. liii.

† Isaiah liii.

‡ Psal. xxii.



ready dead; which he would not have done, had he known what a dreadful night he had had in his agony in the garden, when he sweat great drops of blood, and after this was kept the whole night without sleep, hurried through the streets, first to one High Priest's house, then to another, then to Pilate, then to Herod, then to Pilate again;—and, after all this, out of the city to the place where he was crucified, bearing his Cross, till he could no longer stand under it. But when Pilate had enquired of the Centurion, he gave him leave to take the body.

But before the bodies were taken down, the soldiers brake the legs of the two thieves;—and why not the legs of Christ? They knew nothing of the Passover, and yet God so ordered it, that they broke not his legs;—but one of them, to make sure work, ran a lance into his heart, and fulfilled another prophecy of the Messiah, that “they should look on him whom they had pierced.”

And now he is buried. And, because he had openly declared, that they should kill him, and that after three days he would rise again from the dead,—the Jews took all imaginable care to secure the body till after the third day;—they procured a guard of soldiers to watch the Sepulchre, and sealed the stone that covered the door of the tomb. And such was the order of Providence, that not one of the Apostles were concerned in his burial. Thus God, in a manner we do not always take notice of, confirms our faith.

But after all the care of the Jews, our Blessed Lord did rise again the third day, and conversed with his Disciples, with five hundred at one time; and after he had instructed them in the things concerning his church, he ascended before their eyes into Heaven, there to appear before God—for all such as, through faith in his blood, go unto God for any blessings they stand in need of.

And now, good Christians, do not imagine that I have made these observations upon our Saviour's death and resurrection only to please your curiosity. Very far from it: But it was, that you might be convinced of these truths; forasmuch as the knowledge and firm belief of these truths is the only foundation of our hope of pardon and peace with God. This being the spring and fountain of all the blessings which we either enjoy *now*, or hope for hereafter. Without this, God would never accept of the repentance of any sinner. IT IS JESUS CHRIST (as the Apostle assures us, Eph. vi.) THAT HAS MADE OUR PEACE WITH GOD, BY THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS.

So that it would be the greatest boldness in any man, to presume to ask any favour of

*Zech. xii. 10.*

God, without asking it for Christ's sake, who by his death has obtained this mighty blessing for his sinful creatures,—that God, for his sake, will hear, and receive, and grant our petitions. This is the only refuge of an awakened conscience,—of a sinner who has nothing else to depend on for pardon, but the sacrifice of the death of Christ,—nor any hopes of amendment but by the assistance of that Holy Spirit which Jesus Christ has obtained for us, by his sufferings and resurrection.

Now, therefore, let us consider, what are the uses Christians ought to make of this knowledge of the death of Christ, and of his resurrection.

And in the first place let us be assured,—That we cannot truly understand, how very much God is displeased with sin and sinners, but only by looking upon Jesus Christ upon the Cross; when we see that God would not spare his own Son, when he had put himself into the room and place of sinners, but made him to suffer what they by their sins had deserved to suffer.

That sin deserves death, this we must be assured of, because the righteous Judge of all the earth pronounced that sentence upon our first parents, in case they transgressed the law he had given them. And they had most surely died the moment they sinned, but that the Son of God undertook to satisfy his Father's justice, by undergoing the punishment which they had deserved. And it was on that account their lives were continued, and a time of trial granted them, to see what use they would make of this favour.

In the next place, we learn, by the sufferings of Christ, the exceeding Love of God for us his poor creatures;—that he would suffer his own Son to take our nature upon him, and to be so sadly used, rather than so great a part of his creation should be utterly lost and ruined.

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all that believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” This being the greatest token of the Love of God should lead us to love God with all our soul, and mind, and strength.

And the infinite obligations which we Christians have to love Jesus Christ for what he suffered for us, obliged St. Paul to give this standing rule to the church, “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha;” that is, leave him to the judgment of God, and do not own him for a Christian.

Now, let us consider the end of all this, and why our knowledge and belief of Christ's death is so much pressed upon us by the Holy



Holy Spirit of God. Is it not because this is the very foundation of *that holiness, without which no man must ever see the Lord in peace?*

“Jesus Christ died for all, that they who “live should not live unto themselves, but “unto him who died for them, and rose “again.” Nothing being more just and reasonable, than that we should consecrate our lives to him, which he has redeemed from the power of the devil, and saved us from death eternal.

The end of Christ’s suffering was to save us from our sins,—that he might “purify “unto himself a people zealous of good “works.” “If a man love me,” saith Christ,—if he values me, and what I have done for him,—“he will keep my commandments.” And for our souls’ and for God’s sake, let us often remember, that it is utterly impossible that any man should be happy without being restored, by an holy life, to the image of God;—that alone can make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in Heaven.

And I would to God that every Christian, who hears (and understands) me, would make this (as I bless God I do) one part of his daily prayers,—that God would restore us to his image, and that the image of Satan may be destroyed in us. Jesus Christ, who has declared, that whatsoever we ask the Father in his name, he will grant it us, will certainly grant *this*, if we ask in faith,—to be restored to the image of God, in which our first parents were created, and before they fell into sin.

Now, Christians, you see the true reason why Jesus Christ appointed the Holy Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. It was, that we might keep up the remembrance of his death,—that we might never forget his love and mercy in dying for us;—that, in a grateful remembrance of what he has done and suffered for us, we might dedicate (devote) ourselves, our spirits, souls, and bodies, to his service,—to the service of our Creator;—and that by so doing, we might, by him, be made happy for ever and ever.

And in truth, every Christian, who receives this Holy Sacrament as he ought to do, does it in token that he purposes, through the grace of God, to continue Christ’s faithful servant unto his life’s end; which if he doth, the divine justice cannot punish him for his former sins that he has repented of, no more than if he had never sinned or done amiss. So very great is the mercy obtained for us by Jesus Christ!

It was not for nothing that Christ, when he appointed this Sacrament, commanded, *DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME*; that is, of the holy example that I have set you,—of the holy doctrine I have taught you,—of the sorrows and bitter death I have suffered for you. A sacrifice of love that passeth all expressions and acknowledgments on our part. All that we can do or promise is this:—That we will, by the grace of God, sin wilfully no more, *nor crucify to ourselves the Son of God afresh, by putting him to open shame.*<sup>†</sup>

And, O God! grant that this may be the resolution of every one here present, when he goes to the Lord’s Table,—to sin no more, lest a worse thing follow, than what has yet happened to any of us.

As to the RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST mentioned in the text, it is a blessing for which we ought to be exceedingly thankful; forasmuch as by this, God has given us all the assurance that our hearts can wish, *that he is reconciled to us by the death of his Son*, since he hath raised him from the dead;—and that whatever he hath *said*, or *taught*, or *done*, was agreeable to his divine will, and ought to be believed, and attended to, and followed, as the will of God, at the peril of our souls.

Let us therefore conclude, and we cannot do it better than in the words of St. Peter,<sup>‡</sup> “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord “Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto “a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus “Christ from the dead, to an inheritance “incorruptible and undefiled, and which “fadeth not away, reserved in Heaven “for us.”

And indeed, a true Christian lives on earth in this hope of an inheritance in Heaven.

This life is short; the inheritances of this world are uncertain, its blessings are uncertain, and may, and often are, taken from us while we live; and when we die, part with them we must:—But the goodness of God, and his blessings, and inheritance, endure for ever.

The good Lord grant that we may think much of these things, and that our conversation may be in Heaven, where our Lord Jesus Christ sitteth at the right-hand of God, our mediator and advocate.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, for ever.

<sup>†</sup> Heb. vi. 6.

<sup>‡</sup> 1st Epist. i. 3.



## S E R M O N LXVII.

## THE SIN OF JUDAS PRACTICALLY EXPLAINED AND APPLIED.

LUKE XXII. 21.

*Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table.\**

**B**OTH Judas, and his crime, are spoken of by Christians with the greatest abhorrence; and we cannot think of his punishment without trembling. Well:—Let us all take care then not to imitate him in his sin, that we may escape *his* punishment. Why; is there any need of such a caution? Truly, our church seems to think so, when she exhorts all such as intend to come to the Lord's Table—to repent themselves truly of all their sins, before they presume to eat of that bread, or drink of that cup; lest, after the taking of that Holy Sacrament, the devil enter into them, as he entered into Judas, and fill them full of all iniquity, and bring them to destruction both of soul and body.

And indeed, it is a thing too plain to be concealed, that too many, who come to our Lord's Table, do betray their Saviour and his religion, and expose them both to shame and contempt. I cannot therefore, when I read this sad account of Judas, and the warning which the church gives us upon it, I cannot but be concerned, both for myself and you that hear me, lest we should (as Judas did) go to the Lord's Table with any bosom-sin unrepented of, and without full purposes of amendment of life.

I pray you, therefore, consider with me the nature and circumstances of this sin of Judas, that, by the grace of God, we may all avoid that rock upon which he was lost.

I. And first; it was not this one sin that ruined Judas. Men do not fill up the measure of their iniquities all at once. It was observed of him before, that he was *covetous*, and that being trusted with the money which Christ and his Apostles had to live on, he converted part of this unfaithfully to his own private use. St. John therefore says, *he was a thief*.

Now, from hence we learn how dangerous it is to continue in any known sin; we cannot foresee what it will end in. If the love of money made Judas first a thief, and then a traitor; why should any man else think himself safe, when he has once provoked God to leave him to himself?

And here it will be proper to observe to you, that men are not so much their own masters as they are apt to think. Governed we *must* be, either by *the Spirit of God*, or by *an evil spirit*.

Whenever men provoke God to withdraw *his* protection, that moment the devil takes them under *his* power, and, as the Scripture saith, “leads them captive at his will.” It was thus with Judas; for, after eating the sop,<sup>b</sup> we are told, the devil entered into him, and forced him immediately to go about his desperate undertaking.

This shews the danger of resisting the Spirit of God,—of despising the day of grace,—and the folly of resolving to repent some time or other; as if we were our own masters, as if we could always do what is fit to be done, as if we could resist temptations when we pleased, as if we could foresee our ruin, and were of ourselves able to prevent it.

Was it so with Judas? You see it was not. You see him, when once God had forsaken him, you see him hurried by his new master to his ruin, by a wickedness which we are astonished at, and by a blindness and folly which would be unaccountable, if the Scriptures had not told us who had taken possession of him,—and if we did not know by experience, that wicked men are not governed by reason, but by a power superior to them, and that they *must* do what that power will *have* them to do, let the crime be what it will.

When therefore people seem to wonder, how a man could possibly do such a wicked thing;—how he could be so foolish as for a very trifle to ruin himself; &c. it is because they have not well considered what the Holy Scriptures have told us concerning this matter, namely, *that it is the devil that worketh in the children of disobedience;—that such will do the lusts of their father the devil*, whatever reason or religion say to the contrary.

II. And this will appear still more evident, when we have considered another cir-

<sup>b</sup> John xiii. 27.

\* See Pf. xli. 9. Jer. vii. 9. Matth. xxii. 11. xxvi. 23. Mark xiv. 18. Luke xxii. 48. 1 Tim. vi. 1. Tit. i. 16. circumstance



cumstance of his sin; namely, *that he had sufficient warning given him*, and such as might have hindered him from his designed wickedness, if he had been his own master.

St. Matthew tells us,<sup>c</sup> that before they came to Jerusalem, even in the way, Jesus took the *Twelve*, and said unto them, *The Son of Man shall be betrayed unto the Chief Priests, and they shall condemn him to death.*

St. John tells us,<sup>d</sup> that another time Jesus was troubled in Spirit, and testified, saying, *One of you shall betray me.* After this, when the *Twelve* were troubled, every man for himself, and asked our Lord this question,—*Is it I?* Judas did the same; to whom Jesus gave this plain answer, *Truly it is you.*

Now, all this did not hinder him from his wicked purpose. And the reason was, he was not *now* his own master; so that neither *fear* for himself, nor *love* for his Lord, nor the *baseness* of the crime, could prevail with him to repent of his evil project.

You will perhaps say, that if he was not his own master, his crime was the less. By no means. He might have continued under the protection of God, if it had not been his own fault. It is true, the devil is still seeking whom he may devour; that is, whom he may be permitted to devour; but then, we are well assured, that he is permitted to be master of none but such as, by a course of wilful, presumptuous sins, have forced the Spirit of God to leave them to themselves.

And here let me tell you, that it is a very unwarrantable way of speaking, that some people have got, when they hear of any person falling into evil courses, or coming to some ill end:—They say, he was born to it,—it was his fortune, and the like. Pray hear what Christ said of Judas: “Woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed.” Jesus Christ would not have said so, if Judas had not brought this evil upon his own head, by hardening his heart, and adding one sin to another, until God thought fit to permit the devil to enter into him, and *then* he filled up the measure of his iniquities.

Christians should rather learn from hence, to keep their consciences *tender* and *awake*;—to take notice of the warnings given them;—to repent while it is in their power;—and above all things, they should consider very seriously what a desperate thing it is, to go to the Lord’s Table, without full purposes of amendment of life. The very meaning of the word SACRAMENT is, *an oath or act by which every Christian binds himself to become Christ’s faithful servant.*

Now to God, who knows all our hearts, and how sincere our repentance is; and how serious our purpose of leading a new life;—to God, who knows this, it will be a most provoking crime, to go to the Lord’s Table without considering what we are a doing,—without *repentance*,—without *faith* in God’s mercy through Christ,—without *charity*,—and without *resolving to amend where we have done amiss.*

This was the very sin of Judas, which gave Satan full possession of him. For he was not content to entertain a most wicked design, but he would carry it off as if he were as faithful a disciple and servant as any Jesus had. And he had so well concealed his hypocrisy, that even his fellow disciples could not guess *him* to be *the man*, rather than any other.

But is a man the safer because he can conceal the purposes of his heart from men? Not at all. That which was the case of Judas will be the case of every presumptuous sinner. Every such act will set him farther out of God’s favour, and give the devil still more power over him, till he has neither an *heart*, nor *power*, to repent.

III. Perhaps, you will say, it had been less a sin, if Judas had not come to his Lord’s Table. Why, truly, so it had, while he had such a wicked design in his heart. But you will not sure infer from hence, that Christians had better forbear coming to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, than come where there is so much danger. I would desire you to consider this thing seriously.

One end of the Lord’s Supper is to distinguish Christ’s servants from the subjects of the devil. “Do this,” saith our Lord, “in remembrance of me.” This then is the short of the matter:—If we do *not* come to the Lord’s Table, we are not one with Christ, nor Christ with us. If we do come with evil in our hearts, we are just such servants as Judas was. But if we go to the Table of the Lord, with sincere desires of being *faithful* though *unworthy* servants of Christ, he will then accept us; he will forgive us what is past, and make us better for the time to come.

Now, if this is the truth of the matter, and it really is so, one would wonder how any Christian dare lightly turn his back upon the Lord’s Table, when he has an opportunity offered him; it is in effect saying, for *this time* I will *not* own myself a servant of Jesus Christ. The Lord’s Supper is an outward sign or token, by which Christians profess, to all the world, that they are not ashamed of Christ crucified, but that they hope for salvation by his death.

<sup>c</sup> Chap. xx. 28.<sup>d</sup> Chap. xiii. 21.



IV. The next thing that I would have you to take notice of in this matter is, *the wonderful patience of our Saviour*. He knew who it was that should betray him; and yet he bore with him so far, as to wash his feet the very night before he was betrayed.

Christians are too apt to rely (more than they have warrant for) upon God's patience. You see, by this man's example, that it is great presumption to do so, while we continue in sin. He bears with the greatest sinners; but if his goodness does not lead them to repentance, there is a time (you see) when Satan takes entire possession of them, and is permitted to do so, because God will no longer protect them from his rage and malice.

V. If, in the last place, we consider the bargain this miserable man made for himself, we may learn instruction even from *that* circumstance of his treason.

The Sacred Scripture tells us, it was *for thirty pieces of silver*; that is, in our money, about three pounds fifteen shillings.

You wonder that a man should be so bewitched, as for such a wretched sum to be guilty of so horrid a crime. This shews us plainly how sin blinds the eyes of our minds. It is not Judas only that makes these mad bargains;—every man that sells his soul for gain, or pleasure, is as mad, and blind, as he was;—and, when they come to die, will be convinced of it, as effectually as Judas was before he died, who then found his Master's words true to his cost, *What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*

VI. But you will say, perhaps, what is all this to us? We cannot (if we would be so wicked) betray our Lord, and bring destruction upon our heads, *by such a sin as his was?* But indeed the Sacred Scriptures say we may, and crucify him too;<sup>e</sup> and that there are many that do so. I will shew you how: Well, then; what did Judas do more than deliver Christ into the hands of his enemies? And is it not a crime something like this, to bring that church which he has purchased with his own blood into contempt? And do not all Christians do so, whose lives are not answerable to their profession? Who live as if they did not believe *one word* of what he taught, or suffered for us. Who (as far as it lies in their power) do, as the Apostle speaks,<sup>f</sup> “tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing,” as if Jesus Christ had suffered as an evil doer; “and do despite unto the spirit of grace.” This is at least betraying the cause for which he suffered; and it is betraying it after such a manner as

Judas did, namely, at the same time that we pretend to be his friends and servants.

And may not our Lord say of such, as he did of Judas? Behold! he that betrayeth me,—one for whose ransom I have given my own life,—one who is called by my name, who comes to my table as a friend, professing thereby to be a member of my family;—who expects to be saved for my sake, to be raised by my power, and to be justified by faith in me;—*even this man betrays me*:—For, as soon as he goes from my table, he forgets the favours he *there* received,—the promises he *there* made of being mine for ever;—he goes amongst mine enemies, by whom my name and doctrine are blasphemed;—and he *lives* and *speaks* just as they do. So that you could not guess him to be a disciple of mine, but that he comes to my table; and that, you see, is only to *betray me*,—to make men believe, that I have indeed *no faithful servants*;—that whatever my disciples pretend, they would all, like Judas, betray me, and my cause, when they meet with a suitable temptation;—to make men hope that I may be deceived, and pleased with an outward profession, with a formal visit to my house, or coming to my table as a friend, when, at the same time, they neither *respect* my person, nor *obey* my commands.

Now, that this is what our Lord may justly say, nay, what he *will say*, to all those Christians who do not live answerable to the means of grace his goodness affords them, is very plain from his own words:<sup>g</sup> “Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence you are; depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.”

VII. This is the account of Judas, and of those that imitate him, and *this* their portion.

Let us cast our eyes upon *that master* whom he so unworthily betrayed. And this master was THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, who came down from Heaven, to teach men how to please God, and how to be for ever happy. And though he was the Son of God, yet he took upon him the nature of man, that he might more freely converse with men, and convince them of the mere vanity of *this* world, when compared with that happiness, which, by the favour of God, they might attain in the next. He first convinced his own disciples, that he came from God, by miracles which none but God can do;—then he shewed them in what *true blessedness* con-

<sup>e</sup> Heb. vi. 6.<sup>f</sup> Heb. x. 29.<sup>g</sup> Luke xiii. 26.



fitted. He gave them rules of holy living;—how to walk so as to please God;—and by his own blessed example, he shewed them what was true piety, and to what a pitch of virtue men might attain, assisted by the grace of God.

And now, it being decreed from eternity, that man, having sinned, should not be pardoned and restored to God's favour, but by a sacrifice worthy of God, Jesus Christ (such was his love for men) was willing to become this sacrifice. But before his death, (that this instance of his love might never be forgotten) he appointed that ordinance which we call *The Lord's Supper*, to which none, at their peril, should come, but such as were, and sincerely purposed to continue, his faithful servants.

Judas was the first example of profaning that holy ordinance, and very dreadful was his punishment. St. Paul tells us, that the Corinthians, many of them, smarted for the same fault. And I have made choice of these awakening words of Christ, "Behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table," to deter all such as would come to the Lord's Table *merely out of custom*, without examining themselves,—as St. Paul directs all Christians to do, who would not draw down God's judgments upon their heads.

And this *may* be done, and acceptably too, by the most unlearned Christian; *otherwise it would not be a Duty*.

Every Christian knows, for example, where he has done amiss; and he knows too, whether he has taken pains to reform. Every Christian, upon due examination, can tell, whether he has kept the vows he made when he was last at the Lord's Table; and he knows, that if he has not, there will *now* be need of a better preparation.

By this ordinance *we do shew the Lord's death till he come*; that is, till he come to judgment.

Now, every Christian can tell whether he orders his life so as to have reasonable hopes of mercy at that *great day*; otherwise the Lord's Supper must needs be an occasion of sorrow, as well as guilt. And a man must go with a sad heart to *that table*, where he must make *those vows* which he knows he does not design to keep. Lastly; every Christian knows, that when we go to the Lord's Table, our duty is,—to give up ourselves to God, as we did at our baptism,—to resolve to live so as becomes the Gospel of Christ,—and to call ourselves to an account whether we do so or not. He that does not do this goes rashly and unworthily to the Lord's Table, and has reason to fear the consequence; since he abuses that means,

which, *of all others*, was designed to secure us in the fear of God, and in his favour.

VIII. I have not, good Christians, set this history before you, to affright you, or to drive you from the Lord's Table, but to persuade you to come, as Christians ought to do.

*First*, in obedience to the command of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of me."

*Secondly*, out of a sense of your own wants, and to obtain those graces which are necessary to your salvation.

*Thirdly*, with full purposes of amending where you have done amiss.

And, *fourthly*, resolving to shew your thankfulness for God's mercies to you, by walking more warily for the time to come;—striving against those sins which you are most apt to fall into,—avoiding those temptations which have formerly overpowered you,—and praying daily for grace to overcome them.

And therefore, I tell you again, that if you hope to avoid the danger of *receiving unworthily*, by forbearing to go to the Lord's Table, you will be miserably mistaken. For whatever it is which indeed *ought* to hinder you from going to the Lord's Table, the same will keep you also out of Heaven.

And pray consider, how careful parents are, to have their children *baptized*, that they may have a *real title* to the *favour of God*, and an interest in the *covenant of grace*.

But why all this care, if you do not oblige them, when they come of age, to undertake themselves what you promised for them? If you do not set them an example of religion, and bring them to the Lord's Table, *there* to renew their vows, and to claim a right to the grace of God promised to all worthy receivers of that Holy Ordinance? Alas! if you do not do *this*, you only breed them up in a mistake, that a *Christian Name*, without a *Christian Life*, may be of some use to them; a mistake which too many are apt to run into, though the Apostle assures us, "that without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

I shall now conclude, after I have recommended a few things to be *seriously considered and remembered by you*.

As, *first*, You see how careful people should be, when either they *make* or *renew* their vows, not to do it rashly, but upon due consideration. God, *who sees the heart*, is, no doubt of it, well pleased to see people come before him with honest purposes of doing what they can to please him; and he will certainly reward such with grace necessary to their present condition. But if you come merely out of custom, or to comply with the laws of the church, without mind-  
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ing what you are about to do, why then God, who sees the inward disposition of your heart as plainly as we do your outward behaviour, *will not give you his Spirit, nor his blessing.*

It is true, when we were infants, God received us into favour and covenant, by virtue of that promise, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed." We were then made members of the church of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven.

Now, because Christians are too apt to fall into a carnal security, they are often called upon, to try whether their faith and lives be answerable to their profession; and if they have not been so, to take up better purposes for the time to come, and to be very earnest with God for grace to enable them to perform the vows they make of better obedience. To this end, some are called upon to take upon themselves their baptismal vow; others, to renew that vow at the Lord's Table. If you do this in the sincerity of your hearts, God will certainly bless you with more light to know your duty, and more ability to perform it: If you do not, you will find to your cost, that you have received the grace of God, given at your baptism, in vain.

*Secondly*; You see by this sad instance of Judas, that one may go to the table of the Lord, without being a friend of Christ,—without being a true Christian,—without receiving any benefit from that holy ordinance. And, therefore, as you value your souls, do not depend upon *that* without a life answerable to your profession.

Our Lord himself has told us what his answer will be to such as shall plead this privilege, *Have we not eat and drank at thy table?* when, in the mean time, they dishonoured him by their ungodly lives:—"Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity, I know ye not;" that is, I will not own you for my friends or disciples. If this is all we shall have to plead, Judas could say the same; and yet how dreadful was his punishment! And the more so, because he abused so many opportunities of securing his Lord's grace and favours, being so often a guest at his Table.

Well then, if ye would avoid the sin of Judas, by all means go to the Lord's Table, NOW YE ARE SO SOLEMNLY INVITED; but do not go with a wicked heart. If you are not in charity with all men;—if you are conscious that you have done any wrong, and are not willing, and resolved as soon as possible, to make amends;—if you do not, to the best of your power, follow that rule

of your Lord, "To do to others, as you would they should do to you;"—if you live in any known sin, such as *covetousness*, (which you know was Judas's peculiar vice) or *drunkenness*, or *profaning the Lord's Day or his Holy Name*;—if you live in a careless neglect of yourselves and of your families, never calling upon God for a blessing upon your labours, or upon your children, or giving him thanks for the blessings you every day receive at his hands;—why then, you have no business to go to his Table, unless you solemnly resolve to amend where you have done amiss, and *so resolve* as to begin a reformation even before you go to the Lord's Supper. Otherwise, never expect either *benefit* or *comfort* from that Holy Ordinance.

And pray remember, that when you go to the Lord's Table, it is one part of your business there, *to shew the Lord's death till he come*; that is, till he come to judgment.

Now, this thought should put us all upon considering how our accounts stand? Whether we have reason, according to the terms of the Gospel, to hope for mercy *at that day*? If we *have not*, it concerns us very much to think of a *new life*.

Lastly; that which made the sin of Judas so *intolerable a burthen*, when his eyes were open, *was*, that he saw his Lord, who had been so kind to him, so unworthily treated, and that *by his means*.

Now, should not this put Christians upon thinking what contempt and reproach they bring upon Christ and his doctrine, when they go, as friends, to his Table; and yet no sooner come from thence, but join with his *bitterest enemies* to make the *Table of the Lord contemptible*? So that *weak or wicked people* cry, what should we go to the Lord's Supper for? Those that go are no better than those that stay away. Where is the power, where is the grace, that attends it? They say, that by *this ordinance* they are *one with Christ*, and that Christ is *their head*. Would they have us to judge of Christ by his members?

Thus *we* betray, thus *they* crucify him.

The good Lord grant that all you, who purpose, at this most solemn time, to be guests at the Lord's Table;—that you may prepare yourselves to come worthily;—that others seeing your good works, and the good effects of God's grace given you at his Table, may *think* and *speak* worthily of our Saviour, and be prevailed with to become his faithful servants;—that *we* and *they* may, by him, be made eternally happy, through the same Jesus Christ. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all honour, power, and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

SERMON



## S E R M O N LXVIII.

A DISTINCT PART OF THE HISTORY OF OUR SAVIOUR'S RESURRECTION  
PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED AND APPLIED.

M A T T H. XXVIII. 11, 12, 13, 14, 15.

*Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the Elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the Governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: And this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.*

**M**Y design, in the choice of these words, is not to raise your indignation against the Jews, for persisting so far in their wickedness, as to endeavour to stifle the truth, by lies and bribery; for *they* did what *all men*, destitute of the grace of God, and following the bent of corrupt nature, are *apt* to do, *have* done, and *will* do, to the end of the world.

Neither would I take pains to shew the folly of this story, with which, after they had assembled the *Elders*, and *taken counsel*, they possessed the heads and minds of the people: for all wickedness is *folly* at the bottom, let there be never so many to counsel it.

But there being a great many very useful instructions which may naturally be drawn from this history and passage, and which may serve to shew us our *own* sin and folly, as well as that of the Jews;—that we are as liable to the same obstinacy and unbelief as *they* were, if we are not careful to preserve our minds from the prejudices *they* laboured under;—that it is *not* for want of sufficient proofs, that there are so many unbelievers, but chiefly for want of *good dispositions, honest hearts, and integrity* of manners;—and, lastly, that *truth* will get the better of *falsehood*, of *lies*, and of *imposture*, at the last, though all the world combine to stifle and oppose it.

These being useful instructions, and natural consequences from this part of the history of our *Saviour's resurrection*, I would, by the assistance of God's good Spirit, so treat of them, as that we may better see the prejudices we labour under;—that we may endeavour to get clear of them;—and that our faith in *this*, as well as in the other articles of the Christian Religion, may be found *unreprovable* in the sight of God.

I. It appears very strange to us, at first sight, that the Jews, who had in their hands

the many prophecies of the Messiah, who expected and prayed for his coming, should yet so violently oppose him when he appeared amongst them. And yet this is very easily accounted for:—Their hearts and affections were much set upon *this* world;—they expected, and they hoped for, such a Redeemer, as would fight their battles, overcome their enemies that kept them under, and who should set them above all the nations of the earth.

Now, it was plainly impossible, that people, under such prejudices and expectations as these, should generally receive our Saviour in the mean and humble circumstances in which he appeared. He owned and declared, that his kingdom was not of this world;—that his followers must expect no earthly power or preferment from *him*;—and his appearance was accordingly. He affected *no grandeur*,—he refused the very honours that were offered him;—and all his discourses to those poor people with whom he for the most part conversed, were concerning a world to come, and how they might fit themselves for future happiness, by refusing the present.

It is true, there were people who received this doctrine, and him that brought it; but who were they? Why, *such only* whose affections were not too much set upon the things of this life;—such as were convinced this is not the world they were made for;—such as were sensible of, and mourned for their sins and infirmities;—the humble and meek in spirit,—the pure in heart,—all such as desired to *know* and to *do* the will of God: To all these the appearance and the doctrines of Jesus Christ were very reasonable and acceptable;—to all others he was a *stumbling-block* and an offence.

And we shall not wonder it was so with the Jews, when we consider, that it is just so with us at this day.

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The truths of the Gospel are preached, explained, recommended, insisted upon, as absolutely necessary to be believed and observed by all that hear them, as they hope for salvation. You need not be told, that many, very many, whose interest it is to hear these truths, do not at all regard them. The thing is too plain to be questioned.

Do you believe that such people would have been convinced of their error, and would have mended their lives, if they had heard our Saviour himself, and seen his miracles? In truth, they would not.

Our Saviour himself tells us, that men who will not hearken to the ordinary means of conversion, *they that will not hear Moses and the Prophets*, "will not be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."—And constant experience bears witness to this truth.

One man is affected with those passages of the Gospel, which another takes no notice of;—one is convinced and converted, while another is hardened by the same arguments. What can be the reason of this, but that all men are not equally disposed to receive the truth, when it is fairly proposed to them?

Why else should the Jews be so very desirous to have our Saviour's resurrection disbelieved, as to break through all the rules of conscience and honesty to discredit that truth? Why, this was truly their case:—They had entertained in their hearts an aversion to his person and character, because of the humble condition in which he appeared;—they hated his doctrine, because it discovered their vile hypocrisy, and required such a righteousness as far exceeded that they boasted of;—they decried his miracles, because they were wrought to confirm a doctrine which they would not receive:—In short; they proceeded so far at last, as by false accusations and false witnesses to take away his life; and, being thus prejudiced against him, they could not hear of his *resurrection from the dead*, but with the utmost disdain and vexation of mind; for *this* made them murderers, at least, of a person beloved of God, who otherways would not have raised him to life again, after *they* had crucified him.

These things put them upon this vile act set down in the text,—to hire men to set abroad a lie, which they themselves had forged.

And there is nothing in this whole proceeding, which is not natural, and which is not acted every day by men who are given over to a mind void of judgment. They hate the persons and the characters of such as plainly reprove them;—they hate the doctrines which would restrain them

from following their own inclinations; and by these prejudices are prepared to do the vilest thing to discredit what they hate so bitterly.

Now, these passages are recorded in the Gospel, and in other Scriptures, not to make us find fault with others, but that we may discover the corruption of our own hearts, by the faults we may observe in other people.

And in this instance we learn how very hard it is, when we have done a *weak*, or an *ill* thing, to be brought to own it, and to confess that we have been in the wrong.

The Jews here would not consider what a wicked thing they had done, and how bitterly they ought to repent of it, if this person whom they had crucified were indeed, what he said he was, *the Son of God*. And yet, if what the soldiers said were true, it was manifest, he was *more than man*; and yet they durst not enquire into the truth of this, because it would necessarily create in them great trouble of mind;—they therefore took the short and usual way, to get rid of the shame and confusion which attends conviction,—they gave out, that Christ was not risen, but that his disciples had stolen him away,—and they hired others to say the same thing;—hoping, by this means, to get quit of the shame of having murdered an innocent person. As for the guilt of such an act, such persons seldom lay that to heart.

Now, what are we to learn from all this? Why, in the first place, never to take up a prejudice against any thing or person, without reason; for it is plain we cannot lay it down when we please. There is no question of it, but that these very Elders, who agreed to give money to propagate a lie of their own making, yet spoke what they thought, when, but three days before, they mockingly told our Saviour, that if he would come down from the cross, they would believe him to be the Messiah:—Alas! we do not know what will convince a mind averse to the truth.

For though God was not pleased to gratify the demands of those wicked men, and to satisfy them after their own way, (because he knew nothing would convince them) yet when he did that very thing, which they said would satisfy them, after a more wonderful way;—when he had suffered him to die upon the cross, and to be buried in their sight;—when their malice and their caution could go no further;—then God took him out of their hands, raised him to life, made *their own watch* witnesses of his resurrection;—which was a much greater miracle than they demanded, and yet they did not believe, but very wickedly attempted to pervert the truth, by bribing the watch.

II. And



II. And we have another instance, in *this watch*, of the corruption and deceitfulness of all our hearts. It was but just before that they were so terrified with the sight of an Angel, that they became as dead men: And one would have thought they should not so soon have forgotten their fears, or be tempted with the greatest reward to set about a lie, which they very well knew to be so: But while we wonder at this, we do not consider that this is too often acted by ourselves.

The providence of God brings us into troubles, terrifies us with his judgments, and yet no sooner are we recovered of our fears, but we return to our old ways, and are ready for any wickedness the tempter shall lead us into.

When therefore, we resent the hard-heartedness either of the Jews or their watch,—when we wonder at them,—let us look to ourselves, lest we be guilty of the same crimes of which we accuse them;—let us consider, that the Son of God may *be crucified again, and put to open shame*;—that this is often done, not by the Jews, *his professed enemies*, but by Christians, who are called by his name.

Let us consider, that if we live as if we were never to rise again, we do, as much as in us lieth, baffle all the arguments and proofs which God has given us of our *Saviour's* and of our *own* resurrection.

It is true, Christ is risen from the dead, and will come again to judge the world in righteousness;—this is true, and will come to pass, whether we believe it or not. But yet we may, by our wicked lives, very much hinder the effects this truth ought to have upon all that hear of it; and so far we are guilty of the same sin the Jews are branded for; we endeavour to persuade men, that Christ is not risen, and that they need not fear the consequences of a resurrection.

III. *But Truth will get the better of falsehood, let who will combine to stifle it:* And God will be glorified in the destruction of those who shall despise the means he has ordained for their salvation. We see this very plainly in the instance before us; and while God (the God of Truth) governs the world, it must be so.

And here we cannot but admire the wonderful simplicity of the Gospel,—as if the Holy Penmen were not concerned what the world would think of what they had left upon record. If any of us were to have written this part of the history, how should we have been tempted to have reflected upon the elders of the Jews for this base practice, in acting contrary to their own consciences,

drawing other people into the sin and snare, and imposing a lie upon posterity, which they themselves had forged! How should we have endeavoured to have exposed the folly of these people, who, *after taking counsel too*, advised the most absurd thing to be told,—advised people to say what was done while they themselves were asleep!

But, however agreeable this would be to *our* reason and inclinations, this is not the way of the Spirit of God, who only relates the matter of fact, and lets us know that this story was current amongst the Jews, even till the time when this Gospel was written, which was about eight years after these things happened.

And indeed this is exactly agreeable to the way of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament. When he gives us, for instance, an account of the creation, he is not solicitous to prove that *there is a God*;—he justly supposes that those people, who cannot see God in his works, will not be convinced by all the arguments that can possibly be made use of;—and that none do ever make it a doubt whether God made the world, but those who think it their interest to question his being.

And in very deed, we seem over careful and wise, when we are very solicitous to prove, by arguments drawn from human reason, the great truths of religion, which from the beginning were effectually secured and established by the providence of God, and will ever be received and embraced by all such as are ordained to (that is, disposed for) eternal life.

IV. *Unbelievers, it is true, there are many, but not for want of sufficient proofs, but chiefly for want of good dispositions, and a just sense of their condition.* It is with many of us at this day, as it was with the rulers of the Jews:<sup>b</sup> A miracle they own was done by the Apostles; but the consequence of being convinced of this was not, that they embraced the Gospel, or believed in *him* by whose name and power that miracle had been wrought; instead of that, they strictly charged the Apostles not to preach or teach any more in that name. Here was no want of means, but want of a will to be converted.

And indeed the severest truths, and most contrary to our corrupt nature, will be received, when the grace of God meets with an humble, teachable disposition. Those, for instance, who live like men that hope for advantage by a resurrection, will willingly receive that article as well as any of the rest; they will easily perceive, for example, that it could not be the interest of any body to preach a doctrine so contrary to flesh

<sup>b</sup> Acts iii.



and blood, and which obliged the teachers themselves to a very strict life and conversation, and to a perpetual watchfulness over their words and actions. They will easily perceive, that the Apostles of Jesus Christ could not affirm that they saw the Lord, and conversed with him, after his resurrection, for many days together, if they had not been truly certain of this, and were convinced that it was their duty to publish this to the world. For what did they get by bearing this testimony? Nothing but scorn and contempt; at least, from the greatest part of their hearers.

And let us here observe, that this case of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ is very different from those persons, who, in all ages, have suffered reproach and punishments for setting up doctrines of their own invention, for the commandments and ordinances of God.

A man may, (for instance) prejudiced by education, or heated by passion, or possessed by an evil spirit, embrace falsehoods for truths,—propagate them zealously,—and suffer for them, believing himself, all this while, in the right, and suffering for a righteous cause,—and bound in conscience to propagate the things he has thus embraced for truths at the hazard of his life:—But this was not the case of those that bare testimony, and suffered for the truth of the Gospel. They declared and suffered for a matter in which they could not possibly be deceived. They affirmed (for instance) that Jesus Christ, with whom they had conversed some years, and who had taught them the way of salvation; after he had been crucified in the face of the world, the third day rose again from the dead, and conversed with them for many days together, and instructed them in the things concerning his kingdom. This was a matter in which neither prejudice, nor pride, nor worldly interest, nor any other passion, could have any place. They only affirmed what they could not but know, *if it was true*; and they suffered death rather than conceal or deny giving their testimony to what they knew for certain.

This was what every *wise, and good, and honest man* ought to do; and such a man will never countenance those, who embrace errors without reason, and suffer rather than forego them, or leave off to propagate them to the world.

In short; to suffer for a truth, which is plainly contained in the Holy Scriptures, which Scriptures have been attested by matters of fact, and confirmed by miracles;—to suffer for righteousness' sake; that is, for not consenting to, and complying with cus-

toms and manners plainly forbid by the Gospel;—this is to suffer as a Christian, and such sufferings will certainly be rewarded at the resurrection of the just.

But to suffer for matters in themselves indifferent, which neither set forth the glory of God, nor, in truth, set forward the salvation of men, by leading them to faith and virtue; this is to suffer, not for conscience, but for humour's sake; it may therefore deserve pity, but not reward.

To conclude the whole:—We see, by this act of the Elders of the Jews, how far people may be led by *self-love, worldly interest, vain-glory, and prejudice*, to do very abominable things, which they would hate and condemn at another time, and in other people. We see in *them*, how one wickedness does almost necessarily draw on and make way for another. We here learn, how going against reason and conscience does blind the heart, and so darken the understanding, that it destroys at last *good sense, natural modesty, and common honesty*.

After all, we are very much mistaken, if we imagine, and conclude from hence, that *they* were the most blinded and obstinate people that ever lived, or, in Christ's words, that *they were sinners above all people*.

It is matter of fact, that the same steps, the same self-love, the same love of the world, the same consenting to known iniquity, will lead any of us to the very same blindness, to the same hard-heartedness, to the same unreasonable wickedness, which we see and condemn in *them*.

We learn from hence, that it is not worth our while to contend for any thing, however grateful to our passions, except the truth. We may persuade ignorant people; but the providence of God will at last scatter the mist with which we darkened their eyes, and they will see their error, and the vile wickedness of those that imposed upon them, as plain as we now see the malice and the folly of these people.

In one word; the great care and caution of the Jews, in sealing the sepulchre, in setting a watch, and afterwards in bribing that very watch to set about a lie; all these methods, which they took to discredit our blessed Saviour's doctrine and resurrection, by the providence of God, were made to serve the better to confirm this important article of the Christian faith.

Let us then leave them, and come to ourselves.

The very same God, who has given us so great an assurance, and so plain a testimony, that there will be *a Resurrection, and a Life*



to come, has given us the same proof, that there is something on our part to be done, to make that life a blessing.

It is not to repeat the Creed that makes a Christian, but to add to our faith *virtue*;—to make a conscience of our ways;—to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

If we confess with our mouths the Lord Jesus, and believe with our hearts that God hath raised him from the dead, we may be saved. But then let us consider what this means: *Believe with the heart*; that is, so consider the importance of his resurrection, as that it holds forth to us an infallible instance and proof of God's power and decree to raise up all mankind from the dead;—those that have done good, to endless glory; and such as have done evil, and have not repented and brought forth fruit meet for repentance, to misery everlasting.

So that the belief of a Resurrection, and a Life to come, will easily be perceived to be of no manner of advantage to any man who does not order his life according to the laws of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

To those that do resolve, by God's gracious assistance, to do so; to all such, this article holds forth to them matter of great comfort. They are hereby assured, that if they want

or suffer, or sometimes are under doubts and fears *here*, a time will come when all these shall be at an end, and they shall at last be comforted.

It was for *this*, and such-like reasons, that the Christian world has ever made the festival of our Saviour's Resurrection a time of serious joy, and rejoicing. But, for such as have not any reason to rejoice in the knowledge of a Resurrection, and yet *do rejoice* for company, is as unfit and thoughtless, as it would be for men, who live by robbery, to rejoice because the laws have made it death to do so.

Rather let us express our gratitude to God for his mercies to us in Jesus Christ, and shew forth our thankfulness for the same, by the way Jesus Christ himself has appointed; obliging ourselves, by the Blessed Sacrament we receive at this good time, to live holy lives for the time to come.

And may the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make us perfect in every good work, to do his will; working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ! To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. *Amen.*

## S E R M O N LXIX.

E A S T E R - D A Y.

THE DELIVERANCE OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL FROM THEIR BONDAGE IN EGYPT, A TYPE OF THE REDEMPTION OF THE WORLD BY JESUS CHRIST.

EXOD. xii. 26, 27.

*And it shall come to pass, when your children shall say unto you, What mean you by this service? That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses.*

THE church has made choice of this twelfth chapter of Exodus, for part of the service for *this day*, with great reason. We have, in this chapter, an account of the *greatest deliverance* that ever people had from a bondage and slavery the most grievous and dreadful. And the way by which God brought this about was *still more wonderful*.

The Egyptians, who had oppressed the Israelites, and evil intreated them for a long time, paid dearly for it at last, and felt the displeasure of God in a number of the most remarkable plagues that ever nation had suf-

fered. And when these would not do, God, to shew them their sin in their punishment,—for they had barbarously murdered all the male children of the Israelites,—God therefore resolved in one night to destroy all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both of man and beast; which sentence was accordingly executed: But that the Israelites might escape in this dreadful calamity, they were the evening before commanded to kill, every family, a lamb; and to sprinkle the blood upon the door-posts of their houses, that the destroying angel, seeing the blood, might



*pass over them.*—This destruction was so terrible and surprising to the Egyptians, that they intreated and even forced *them* to be gone, whom so lately they had held in subjection.

Thus was this deliverance wrought;—and, *that it might never be forgotten*, God himself ordained, that every year, upon that very day, for all generations to come, the people of Israel should *keep the Passover*; that is, that they should kill a lamb, sprinkle the blood upon the doors of their houses, eat it with bitter herbs, with their loins girded, and their staves in their hands, as men ready to take a journey.

All which was done for many great reasons, and particularly for *this set down in the text*;—that when their children, in the ages to come, should ask them, what they mean by *this service*? they might then give them an account—of the bitter bondage they had suffered,—of the manner and strangeness of their deliverance,—of the great blessing of being under the immediate direction of God;—to the end that they, and their posterity, having this great work of God every year represented to them after a manner so easy to be understood by the meanest Israelite, might learn to fear *him* who had been so terrible to their enemies; and to serve *him* faithfully all their days, who had been so good and kind to them.

And this service was deemed so necessary, to keep up the remembrance of these things, and to secure the favour of God, that it was commanded, by God himself, under no less a penalty than this: “Whoever shall despise or neglect to observe this service, —that soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel;” that is, he shall be excommunicated.

And indeed an Israelite, *when come to years of discretion*, who did not give *this testimony of his being within the Covenant*, had no right to the promises which God had made to Abraham and to his seed for ever.

Now, this deliverance being both a figure and prophecy of a much greater deliverance, which Jesus Christ was to work for them and for the whole world, this service was ordered to be observed and remembered by all their generations, for ever; that is, until God should by a new revelation alter it. And this prophecy was most exactly fulfilled;—for Jesus Christ was crucified, (and by his blood delivered us) the very same month, the very same day, and expired the very same hour, that the Paschal Lamb was killed.

But what is all this to us? Why, I will tell you:—The *bondage* of the children of Israel in Egypt,—their *deliverance* out of

that slavery,—their *sojourning* and *rebellion* in the wilderness forty years,—their *entrance* into the land of Canaan,—were all *types* (that is, *figures* and *representations*) of what God would afterwards bring to pass. Particularly, the *Paschal Lamb* was a representation of a *greater sacrifice*, and *deliverance*, which was to be wrought, not for one nation only, but for all the nations of the earth. Which *great deliverance*, in God’s good time, was accomplished, when he sent his Only Son into the world; who took our nature upon him,—made known to us the will of God,—set us an example how we ought to walk and to please God,—became a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world;—and to give us the utmost *proof* and *security* that whatever he had *said*, or *done*, or *taught*, *was well-pleasing to God*, GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD; leaving all men without excuse, who shall know these things, and yet shall *reject the counsel of God*, and despise so great a mercy—A mercy so great, that the whole world cannot make us happy without it!

And therefore Jesus Christ, to keep up the memory of his precious death until his coming again, ordained the *same solemn service*, in effect, to be continued, which had been observed by the children of Israel ever since their deliverance out of Egypt; only instead of the PASCHAL LAMB, which was a type of his *death to come*, he appointed BREAD AND WINE, to represent the sacrifice, and preserve the remembrance, of his death *now past*.

And this, by the way, is the true reason why the church requires it of all Christians, that, *at this time especially*, they should receive the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, this being the *very time* when their great deliverance was wrought, and when these memorials of it were appointed.

And though the penalty of not receiving the Sacrament is not expressed in the very words of the old institution, *THAT SOUL SHALL BE CUT OFF*; yet indeed the penalty is far greater,—for such as refuse to keep up the remembrance of Christ’s death, by the solemn service which he has ordained, do in effect despise his death, and the favours he has thereby obtained for all his faithful servants.—After all, I am sensible, how difficult it is to possess our hearts with a just sense of *this mercy*.

The children of Israel, *feeling the smart of their bitter bondage*, no wonder that they rejoiced, *from their very hearts*, when they found themselves delivered from *such a slavery*.

It is true, we also rejoice upon every return of this season; but, God knows with what



what insincere affections!—And the very reason is, we do not *know*, nor *feel*, our misery; for if we did, our souls would be possessed with such a *sincere joy*, upon the sight of the means of our recovery from the power of Satan, and the bondage of corruption; that we should be able to convince others, who shall ask us the *meaning of this service*, with what *good reason* the whole Christian church *has ever observed it*.

Whenever people begin to be seriously concerned for their *eternal welfare*, there are *three things* which never fail to give them great uneasiness of mind.

*First*; The *guilt of the sins* they have already committed.

*Secondly*; The *power of sin*, which they feel themselves subject to.

And, *Thirdly*; The *fear of death*, and its consequences.

To know that I have transgressed the laws of God, and have thereby provoked him to anger;—to find myself so much under the dominion of sin as to love and obey it, even when I know it will be my ruin;—lastly, to foresee *that death* which I cannot avoid, and, what is as tormenting, to fear what will become of me afterwards:—Verily, these are *such evils*, that a man, whose eyes are open, and whose conscience is awake, would choose to undergo all the hardships of an Egyptian slavery, provided he could but be *delivered from this spiritual bondage*.

And this is what Jesus Christ, by his death and resurrection, has obtained for all that are disposed and willing to receive the favour. For “through him is preached “forgiveness of sins” to all such as repent, and resolve to forsake them;—he has also procured for us such graces and helps as are necessary to secure us against all our spiritual enemies, and the corruption of our nature;—and he hath taken out the sting of death, and made it a blessing, instead of a torment, to all his faithful servants.

If, therefore, a stranger to our religion should ask us, what is the meaning of this service? we should answer him, that all mankind were in a state of bondage and slavery; slaves to their own corrupt affections,—slaves to the power of evil spirits,—slaves to the fear of death, and to the fear of what may follow;—that Jesus Christ has delivered us from this slavery and bondage;—and that we keep this service, that neither we, nor those that come after us, may ever forget this great deliverance; for that we had no power to deliver ourselves out of this bondage and slavery, no more than the Israelites had to deliver themselves, unless God had undertaken to redeem us.

Now, that we may truly value the *work of our redemption*, and rejoice with reason as oft we remember it, it will be necessary that we take a view of our misery in the three instances just now mentioned. For too true it is, notwithstanding the bondage we are *certainly in*—too, too many make a shift not to see or feel their misery and danger. With the Israelites (who are a lively figure of the generality of Christians) they are not pleased with their Deliverer; but cry, *would to God we had staid in Egypt!*—forget the hardships they there underwent,—and upon every temptation, are for returning back, despising their redemption.

But though people may for a while divert themselves from seeing their misery and danger, yet when the conscience is once awake, as sometime it will be, we shall be so sensible of the bondage of sin and death, that all temporal evils will appear as nothing in comparison of the *wrath of God*.

That we may escape this, it will be necessary, that we seriously consider *what we are by nature*,—and *what we may be by the favour and merits of our Redeemer*. And this I shall endeavour to do, in explaining the *three particulars* before-mentioned, namely, *The guilt of sin*,—the *power* it has over us,—and *the fear of death*. From all which we can only be *redeemed* by Jesus Christ.

I. Let us first consider, *the bondage we are in upon the account of the sins we have already committed*.

If people know themselves to be sinners, and yet can be easy without knowing how they may obtain forgiveness, it is only because they do not apprehend the danger they are in. They do not know “that the wrath “of God is revealed from Heaven against all “ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.” For if they did, they would certainly be afraid for themselves, “and fear him who “can destroy both body and soul in hell.”

And if men are not under any trouble on the account of their sins, the Sacred Scriptures give us the true reason, “The God “of this world,” (that is, Satan) “hath “blinded the minds of them that believe “not;” so that “the things of the Spirit “are foolishness unto them.” “They cannot see afar off;” that is, they do not foresee the misery that is like to come upon them. They shut their eyes against *that light* which would make them *see and feel* the slavery they are subject to.

The Apostle tells us, “that “by the Law “is the knowledge of sin.” And whoever will hear the Law and the Prophets, will plainly perceive the condition a sinner is in before his guilt is taken away.

Rom. i. 18. 1 2 Cor. iv. 4. 1 1 Cor. ii. 14. 2 Pet. i. 9. Rom. iii. 20.



Is it for nothing, do we imagine, that the Law saith, as the Apostle quotes it,<sup>a</sup> "Curfed" "is every one who continueth not in all" "things which are written in the Book of" "the Law, to do them?"

Is it for nothing that David, upon calling his sins to remembrance, expresseth himself after this sensible manner?<sup>b</sup> "Thine arrows" "stick fast in me, and thine hand presseth" "me sore. There is no soundness in my" "flesh, because of thine anger; neither is" "there any rest in my bones, because of my" "sin. For mine iniquities are gone over" "my head; as a heavy burthen, they are too" "heavy for me. I am troubled; I am bowed" "down greatly; I go mourning all the day" "long; I am feeble and sore broken; I have" "roared by reason of the disquietness of" "my heart."

And let us assure ourselves, that these are the pains, this is the bondage, of every man when he comes to be thoroughly awake. He will be *afflicted*, he will *loath* himself in his own sight, and in the anguish of his soul he will cry out, What shall I do to be forgiven? *What shall I do to be saved?*

To cure, or to prevent, these *sad reflections*,—some shut their eyes,—some divert themselves,—some strive to forget their sins,—others to lessen them. But all this will not do; for there is a power above us; and there are seasons when he will set our sins before us in their *true colours*, and will make us to *see* them, whether we will or not. And then we shall be convinced, and confess, that our sins deserve the wrath and vengeance of God.

And this is not all our misery neither; for we have not only sinned against God, and feel bitter remorse for what is past. But,

II. Secondly; *We are by nature under the power and dominion of sin; and if we are left to ourselves, we shall go on to obey it, against reason, against conscience, though we are sure to be ruined by it.*

The Scripture assures us, and we see it with our eyes, that we are slaves to the most unreasonable passions and desires. Some have *set their hearts upon iniquity*.<sup>c</sup> Others have gone so far, as that the *cannot cease from sin*.<sup>d</sup> Some have sold themselves to *work wickedness*.<sup>e</sup> Some *make a mock of sin*.<sup>f</sup> While others *make their heart as an adamant-stone*,<sup>g</sup> lest they should hear the Law.

Some sin, even when the hand of God is upon them;<sup>h</sup> and others, when he shews them favour.<sup>i</sup> Some think and say, that it is in vain to serve God.<sup>j</sup> And many are so wicked as to think it strange, that others *run not with them into the same excess*.<sup>k</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Gal. iii. 10. <sup>b</sup> Ps. xxxviii. <sup>c</sup> Hos. iv. 8. <sup>d</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 14. <sup>e</sup> 1 Kings xxi. 25. <sup>f</sup> Prov. xiv. 9. <sup>g</sup> Zech. vii. 12. <sup>h</sup> Ps. lxxviii. 31. <sup>i</sup> Is. xxvii. 10. <sup>j</sup> Job xxi. 14. <sup>k</sup> 1 Pet. iv. 3.

Now, if this is not a slavery to be lamented, we must be utterly insensible of danger. It may be, you may imagine that this is but the case of a few profligate wretches, *who are sold under sin*; but, be not deceived, *this is the state of all men by nature*; and men must be strangers to themselves, who do not perceive it to be so. How many have been almost persuaded to be Christians, and after all have fallen back into a state of insensibility! How many have been under strong convictions of guilt, and have made resolutions of better obedience, and yet have returned with the dog to his vomit!

It is not to discourage you that I mention so many instances of our bondage and slavery, but to awaken us all into a just sense of our danger, and that we may be thankful to our GREAT DELIVERER.

III. But there is still another instance of our bondage, and that is, THE FEAR OF DEATH, which, as the Apostle tells us,<sup>a</sup> "subjects us to bondage all our life long." And indeed, there is nothing in nature so truly terrible to an unregenerate person, as the thoughts, but especially *the sight of death*. People may strive to stifle and disguise their fears; but free themselves they cannot, so long as life and conscience lasts. It is a bondage all are subject to.

Let a man be never so great, he is apprehensive of what *Death* will bring him to; and if he be never so mean and miserable, he fears the consequence of going to an unknown world.

If we consider it as the *night of that day* which is given us to work in, and that *when the night cometh no man can work*; how frightful must the thoughts of death be to one who is not prepared for such a change!

And if we consider it as the beginning of eternity, it is still more dreadful.

In short, it will make those to tremble, who pretend to fear nothing else. For which reason it is called "The King of Terrors:"<sup>b</sup> And the Psalmist, when he would express the worst of evils, saith,<sup>c</sup> "the terrors of" "death are fallen upon me."

This, no doubt of it, is a very grievous burthen. God saw it was so; and out of great compassion, sent his Son to deliver us. And indeed there is no way of judging so truly of the greatness of our slavery, as by the *manner of our redemption*. That no other deliverer would serve, but the Son of God himself;—that no *Moses* could be found;—no *Angel*, nor *Archangel*, could work this deliverance for us. This is a sure proof that our case was desperate. Here then is our bondage: And I beseech you to consider,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. ii. 15. <sup>b</sup> Job xviii. 14. <sup>c</sup> Ps. lv. 4.

whether



whether the slavery of Egypt could possibly be more insupportable?

And will not this make the memory of our great Redeemer ever dear to us; who, by his precious death, hath delivered us from the guilt of sin, from the powers of hell, and from the fears of death? And, by his resurrection, we are assured, that God accepted of the price he paid for our redemption.

But, to be a little more particular upon these three heads.

And first, that God is in Christ perfectly reconciled to us, the Scriptures every where assure us: This was the sum of the Apostles' commission, "To preach repentance and remission of sins in his name." "In him," saith St. Paul, "In him we have redemption;" that is, the forgiveness of sins. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin;" that is, upon our repentance; for we must not imagine, that God, for Christ's sake, will forgive us, if we continue in sin. St. Paul gives us a very different account of the design of the Gospel, and the end of Christ's sufferings: "He gave himself for us," saith he, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works."

Whenever, therefore, we please ourselves with the thoughts of what Jesus Christ has done for us, in obtaining the remission of our sins past, let us always have his words present with us: "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

But, secondly, Jesus Christ has not only delivered us from the guilt, but also from the power of sin. He hath delivered us from the powers of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of his Father; that is, he has put us under his protection, so that sin or Satan shall not have dominion over us; for by faith in Jesus Christ we shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

Lastly; he has delivered us from the fear of death, according to that which was spoken of him by the Prophet, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death."—"Whether we live, therefore, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's: For to this end Christ both died and rose again, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living."

The truth is, the sting of death, that which makes it truly terrible, is sin; if we

can but be assured of the forgiveness of our sins, death is no longer to be feared; so saith the Spirit expressly, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

You see therefore, Christians, to whom these mighty favours, these great promises, belong. Even to such as through faith are made partakers of the divine nature; such as have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts. To all such, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an undoubted pledge of peace with God, of security from the dominion of sin, and of immortality to all true believers; that is, to all whose conversation is such as becometh the Gospel of Christ.

But as those Israelites, who, after they were delivered from the bondage of Egypt, rebelled against God and his vicegerent, and were destroyed by sundry kinds of death; as that deliverance was no blessing to them, through their own fault purely, no more will this which we now commemorate be to us, if we set not our affections on things above; if we refuse to follow our Redeemer, "who died for all, that they which live should not live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again."

And now you see, that if our children, or such as are strangers to our religion, ask us, what we mean by this service?—by keeping this feast with so much outward joy at least, and solemnity,—we can tell them with reason, (and oh! that we could tell them from an holy experience!)

That mankind being born of a sinful race, and conversing with others as corrupt as themselves, they became extremely wicked, and an offence to God that made them; to whom they could make no manner of satisfaction for the transgression of his righteous laws;—

That though they were convinced both of the evil of their doings, and the dangers they were subject to, yet they could not avoid those very sins which they foresaw would be their ruin; for being subject to a powerful evil spirit, and taken captive by him at his will, they became liable to every wickedness man could be guilty of;—

That in the midst of these miseries, the world could afford them neither help nor comfort; but on the contrary, meeting with crosses, afflictions, disappointments, at every turn, they were well assured, that this was no place of true happiness;—but then they knew not how to mend themselves;—

And to make their misery complete, in the midst of this very life, which they were apt to be fond of, they were in death; that is, they saw themselves every day nearer death;

<sup>a</sup> Luke xxiv. 47. <sup>b</sup> Eph. i. 7. <sup>c</sup> 1 John i. 7. <sup>d</sup> Tit. ii. 14.  
<sup>e</sup> Hosea xiii. 14. <sup>f</sup> Rom. xiv. 8, 9.

<sup>g</sup> Rev. xiv. 13.

<sup>h</sup> 2 Cor. v. 15.



and though it might put an end to the miseries of other creatures, yet they feared, and not without reason, that to *them* it might be the beginning of a much worse life than this they complain of.

We should then proceed to tell our children the *manner of our deliverance*;—that we, and all mankind, being in these sad circumstances and bondage, Jesus Christ, out of his infinite goodness, undertook to redeem us; and having laid down his life a ransom for us—to assure us, that God was pleased with *that price* of our redemption,—he *rose again*, as on *this day*, from the dead, giving us this sure pledge of our *own* resurrection, and (if it be not our own fault) to everlasting happiness.

For having obtained the *forgiveness of sins*, for all them that believe in him, he has taken out the very *sting of death*, which is no longer terrible to them that die in the Lord.

Having overcome the powers of darkness, they can no longer *have dominion* over us, unless we forsake *the Captain of our salvation*, and go over to his enemies;—having made known to us *the way of life*, and how we may live so as to please God, we need be no longer fearful of his displeasure.

Lastly; having fully made known to us a much better *life and state* than *this*, he has endeavoured to take off our affections from this world, and to place them there where *true, solid, lasting* joys await those that shall be worthy of them.

So that, by possessing our souls with a true sense of these things, we shall be able to propagate our joys, and the reason of them, to all generations to come.

And now, how unpardonable shall we be if we neglect so great means of salvation? How shall many of those condemn us, who lived before these things were accomplished? Whose faith was approved of, because, *though they had not received the promises* as we have “done, yet seeing them afar off, they were “persuaded of them, and embraced them, “and confessed that they were strangers and “pilgrims on the earth.”

What a blessed effect of faith was this! And is it possible to describe the unthoughtfulness of people, to whom God has given a more perfect knowledge of the world to come, and which he has confirmed to us after so convincing a manner by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, if we continue to live like *infidels*, who know not what shall become of them when they die? Who therefore want those many motives to *virtue and holiness*, which (blessed be God!) we plentifully enjoy. For we *certainly know*,—

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 13.

“That our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord;”—

That “God, who raised up the Lord Jesus, “will also raise up us by his own power;”<sup>2</sup>—

That “if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of “God,” (provided for us) “an house not “made with hands, eternal in the Hea- “vens;”<sup>1</sup>—

“That we have a lively hope, by the “resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, “to an inheritance incorruptible and unde- “filed, and that fadeth not away;”<sup>3</sup>—

That, therefore, if our dearest friends are taken away from us by death, “we ought not “to sorrow as those that have no hope;”<sup>4</sup>—

That if, by the providence of God, we lose our goods, we should not be over-much concerned, “since we know we have in “Heaven a better and a more enduring “substance;”<sup>5</sup>—

That if we suffer afflictions, our Lord did so before us;—and that “if we be planted “together in the likeness of his death, we “shall be also in the likeness of his resur- “rection.”<sup>6</sup>

“Let us run, therefore, with patience, “the race that is set before us, looking “unto Jesus the author and finisher of our “faith; who, for the joy that was set before “him, endured the Cross, despising the “shame, and is set down at the right-hand “of the throne of God.”<sup>7</sup>

I said before, that the reason why the church requires of all her members, who are able to understand these things, that they keep *this Service*, which was by Jesus Christ himself appointed, to preserve the memory of our deliverance until his coming again; that they receive the Lord's Supper at *this time especially*, when these great things were accomplished.

Need I put you in mind again of the *penalty* appointed by God himself for those that wilfully refused to keep *the Passover*, which was but a *type or shadow* of this? THAT SOUL SHALL BE CUT OFF. The least that can be meant by that expression is, *that man shall have no benefit by this deliverance*; it shall be no *blessing* to him, whatever it be to others.

Need I tell you what judgments the Israelites brought upon themselves, by forgetting their *great deliverance*?

Lastly; Need I put you in mind of what the Apostle assures us was the consequence, in his time, of receiving the Lord's Supper, without considering the ends for which it was instituted, and the obligation it laid upon

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. <sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. v. 1. <sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. i. 3, 4. <sup>4</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 13. <sup>5</sup> Heb. x. 34. <sup>6</sup> Rom. vi. 5. <sup>7</sup> Heb. xii. 1, 2.



all Christians to lead holy lives; namely, that God visited them very remarkably for their neglect.

I need only tell you, that these things were written for our example, that we should not follow them in their sin,—that we may not share with them in their punishment.

In one word:—This is the true Christian sacrifice, without which there is no remission of sins; it was appointed by Jesus Christ himself to be done in remembrance of his death, until his coming again to judgment. This should, in all reason, put us all in mind

of the account we must then give; and to be always endeavouring to prepare ourselves for that great day, which is to determine our condition for ever and ever.

Now, may God grant that, at the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ to judge the quick and the dead, we may have a share in the resurrection of the righteous, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever.

## S E R M O N LXX.

### THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE TO MANKIND.

A C T S i. 21, 22.

*Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, (i. e. during the time of his ministry) beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day when he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.\**

**T**HAT our blessed Saviour, in making choice of the *number twelve*, for his Apostles, on whom to build his Church, had respect to the *twelve Tribes* of Israel, amongst whom the Church of God had been till that time, there is little reason to doubt. But then that these *twelve* were to be witnesses of *his resurrection*, and that *that* number must of necessity be filled up, for *this purpose*, seems to be spoken with regard to the vast importance of *this truth* especially. It is not said, to be witness with us—of his wonderful miracles,—of his most holy life,—of his divine doctrine,—of his meritorious death,—or of his glorious ascension,—but of *his resurrection*. There must, I say, be some extraordinary reason, that one must be chosen (to supply the place of Judas) to be a witness of *Christ's resurrection*.

And indeed there is so much stress laid upon this matter of fact, both for establishing the truth of Christianity, and for promoting of true piety, (which is the end of Christianity) that the Apostles every where appeal to this article of the Christian faith, both to persuade men to believe the Gospel, as also to live as becomes the Gospel; and they appeal to it, as to a thing in which they could not possibly be deceived. And to shew that they were indeed sincere, they readily laid down their lives for the truth of what

they affirmed; that is, for the truth of what they affirmed *that they themselves had seen and heard*.

It is true, there have been men who have suffered death, rather than renounce a false persuasion which they had embraced; but never man, since the creation, suffered death in defence of a thing which he knew to be untrue.

As then the resurrection of Christ is a matter of fact *of the greatest importance to mankind*;—for if he rose from the dead, it must be by the power of God; and then God owned him for his Son; and consequently he was a teacher sent from God, to let the world know what must be hereafter;—then whatever he said must be true.

It is for instance, most certainly true, as sure as God is true, That there is a life after this;—that there will also be a judgment after this life;—that they that have done good shall go into life everlasting, and they that have done evil into everlasting fire. And consequently those laws and rules which Jesus Christ has given to men are of divine authority, and by them we shall all most certainly be judged at the last day.

These, I say, being the consequences of Christ's resurrection, it was necessary, God being infinitely good and just, that there should

\* See Luke xxiv. 39. Acts iv. 33. xxvi. 22. Rom. i. 4. 1 Cor. xv. 4, 14, 20.



be such a number of witnesses, and such infallible proofs of his resurrection, as should be sufficient to put the truth out of all doubt to men *disposed to receive the truth in sincerity*. Especially, since both *these witnesses themselves*, and *all that heard and received their testimony*, were bound to lay down their lives in defence of this truth.

Observe then *the steps* which our blessed Lord took to establish this truth, and to leave those that would not believe it, *without excuse, and without hopes of mercy*.

And first; he assured his disciples, "That as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly;" which was a sufficient proof of Jonas' being sent from God, for it was certainly known to the Ninevites; "so shall the Son of Man be three days in the heart of the earth."

But lest his disciples should not understand this way of speaking, he tells them at another time plainly, "The Son of Man is delivered into the hands of men, and they shall kill him; and after that he is killed, he shall rise the third day."

And again, speaking of the same subject, he adds, "And now I have told you, before it come to pass, that when it is come to pass, ye might believe:" that is, that ye may know for certain, *that ye are not imposed upon*, either by your own senses, or by the malice of evil spirits, when ye shall see me again; "for, as sure as ye see me now, ye shall see me after I am risen from the dead."

And according to this prediction, he (after that by wicked hands he had been put to death) the very third day *shewed himself alive to his Apostles, by many infallible proofs*; and after that conversed with them *for forty days together*; "speaking of the things pertaining unto the Kingdom of God;" during which time "he appeared unto five hundred of his disciples at one time;" and so as to convince them, to leave them without any doubt of the truth of his resurrection. For otherwise the Holy Writers would have plainly told the whole truth, as they have done in the case of St. Thomas. They tell us, for instance, that he *would not believe*, unless he might have such proofs as *he himself* should think sufficient; he would not take the testimony of ten men, of whose honesty he had had sufficient experience, but he would be convinced after his *own way*, or else he would still be an infidel. "Except" saith he, "I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

<sup>a</sup> Matth. xii. 39, 40.

<sup>b</sup> Mark ix. 31.

<sup>c</sup> John xiv. 29.

<sup>d</sup> Acts i. 3.

<sup>e</sup> 1 Cor. xv.

<sup>f</sup> John xx. 25.

No infidel on earth could be more positive, or could require more particular proofs, than one of Christ's own Apostles. But then he did not persist in his unbelief, when our Lord had condescended to satisfy him after his own heart's desire; for it seems he had not, by other wickednesses, filled up the measure of his sins; and his Lord, who knew what instruments of good both he and St. Peter were like to be, was graciously pleased to pass by the infirmities of his servants; and this doubting Apostle became one of those twelve witnesses of Christ's resurrection, by whose evidence the whole Christian world has been established in the truth of this *most important article of the Christian faith*.

And if there have been people in all ages, who have not been persuaded by *their* testimony, they are such (our Lord himself has said it) they are such as "would not be persuaded though one rose from the dead," as often as they are pleased to call in question any received truth of the Christian religion; being such as either will not be at pains to consider these proofs; or such as have provoked God to leave them to themselves, by giving way to, and entertaining, unnecessary doubts; or lastly, they are such as, by consenting to known iniquity, have made it their interest not to believe any thing which must make them uneasy; and for that reason they bribe their understandings, *as the Jews did the watch*, to own a falsehood rather than believe the truth.

But indeed it is now too late to make objections, and raise scruples, when the *most interested wit*, and *inveterate malice*, of the Jewish rulers, when these things happened, could not stop the world from embracing this truth.

And if you ask why did not *they* believe? The answer is short; *they were not disposed to receive the truth*, or out of desperate madness, they would not own, what they could not but suspect was true, because they must *then* have owned *that they had been the betrayers and murderers of the Son of God*. Whereas a much less crime will, at this day, hinder wicked men from confessing the truth, if it is their worldly interest to deny what they know and have reason to believe is true.

Now, add to all these proofs, that God did ratify the testimony of these twelve Apostles, by enabling them to work miracles, for confirmation of *this very truth*; for with great power, that is, with mighty signs and wonders, gave the Apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus; God himself setting, as it were, his seal to *their testimony*; which had this effect, that the Gospel, wherever this truth was preached, was received by all sorts of people. Well therefore might

St. Luke



St. Luke say, that by *many infallible proofs* the resurrection of Christ was made known to the Apostles, and by them to the whole world.

And now, good Christians, you see upon what undeniable grounds this article of the Christian faith is founded; and I have set them in order before you, that your faith may be confirmed, and that I may from hence have an occasion of shewing you, how a firm belief of *this truth* may become a *principle of life* to every one that believeth.

I observed to you before, that by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, the doctrine of the Gospel is established beyond *any possibility of doubting*, provided men are disposed to receive the truth; particularly, we are not *now* to doubt whether or not our souls are immortal; whether they live when the body is dead. It is plain our Saviour's soul did so, and was again united to his body.

We are not *now* to make it a question, whether there will be a *judgment to come*? Whether there are *rewards* and *punishments* hereafter, as men shall have behaved themselves here? Whether *repentance*, and an *holy life*, are not absolutely necessary to salvation?

These are truths *as certain now*, as that there is a God. And the manner of making them plain to the very meanest capacity will leave all men, who shall hear of these things, without excuse, if they shall not order their lives accordingly. This, therefore, I shall not insist upon any farther; but what I would now desire you to consider, are these following things:—

*First*; That the great care and pains which the Holy Ghost has taken to put *this matter* out of all doubt, shews *the great importance thereof* to mankind. And indeed it is the *foundation of our faith*;—it is by *this* we know certainly, that the Christian religion is of God;—it is the foundation of all our hopes of “an inheritance incorruptible and “undefiled, and that fadeth not away.” It is the only support of Christians in the midst of *the many changes and chances of this mortal life*. And lastly, it is the great blessing we have in exchange for the loss of an everlasting life, which we forfeited when our first parents broke through the commands of God; for ever since that time, *all mankind have, all their life long, been subject to bondage through the fear of death*, until Jesus Christ brought *life and immortality to light*, as well as purchased them for his otherwise miserable creatures. For by his resurrection (having taken our nature upon him) he has assured us, that although God has passed the sentence of death upon us for our transgression, yet for Christ's sake, he will restore us to a much better life, provided we will sub-

mit to the conditions he requires of us in order to obtain it.

“He was” (saith St. Paul,) “delivered “to death for our offences, and raised again “for our justification;” that is, as a plain proof that God accepted of his death as a full satisfaction for the sins of all those whose nature he took upon him; that is, for the sins of the whole world.

Now God having, in this instance, given the world the most certain and convincing proof of the truth of Christianity, men are obliged, at their utmost peril, not only to *embrace it*, as the only means of recovering the favour of God, but of *living* as becomes the Gospel of Christ, since that is the only way of qualifying themselves for eternal happiness. So that there is now no choice left but *this*: “He that believeth and is baptized, “shall be saved; and he that believeth not “shall be damned.”

People may *argue*, and *hope*, and *fancy*, as they please, but as sure as Jesus Christ rose from the dead, (and you have seen what infallible proofs there are of that) *this*, and *this* only, will be the issue of *believing*, or *not believing* the Gospel; to wit, *eternal happiness*, or *eternal misery*.

II. The next thing, therefore, which I would recommend to your serious consideration is *this*:—That there is an effectual power which goes along with a hearty belief of this article of the Christian faith, and which is plainly experienced by those that have embraced it sincerely.

The Apostle desires, above all things, that he may know *Christ and the power of his resurrection*; which will enable such as believe it heartily, to raise themselves from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness, by rooting out all the vices of our nature, and planting in their room such virtues as are absolutely necessary to fit us for Heaven and Happiness.

There is no Christian who has seriously considered, and has attempted to master the corruptions of his nature, but has found, to his sorrow, that it is the most difficult thing in the world to break off evil habits; so very difficult, that as one expresses it, “It is easier “to take a dagger, and strike it into one's “heart, than thoroughly and resolvedly to “deny the lusts and practices one has been “accustomed to.”

Who then would not despair of ever subduing the corruptions of nature and custom, if the same hand which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead had not promised to help all such as flee to him for succour? So necessary is the knowledge and belief of this truth.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iv. 25.    <sup>2</sup> Mark xvi. 16.    <sup>3</sup> Phil. iii. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Henry More's life, p. 114.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Pet. i. 3, 4.



But then it must not be a *bare knowledge*; nor is it enough to profess (though one should profess it every day) that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God, unless we believe, and are persuaded, that the same power which conquered death and hell will assist us to overcome all our evil and corrupt affections, provided we pray earnestly for his grace, depend upon his love, and use our best endeavours to please him: Then may we promise ourselves victory over all the corruptions which by nature we are subject to, while we disclaim all self-confidence, and put our whole trust in God, who raiseth the dead.

III. The next thing which offers itself to our consideration, from the *certainly of Christ's resurrection*, is, *The Certainty of a Life to come*, and a life of endless happiness to all such as receive and obey his Gospel.

"We know," saith the Apostle, "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For which cause we faint not." Blessed, therefore, are the dead which die "in the Lord;" and blessed are they that are alive, who live unto God, who love him, and keep his commandments. For all such, our Lord Christ is gone to prepare a place, that where he is, there they may be also; where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, that at last we may be meet partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in Heaven.

IV. You see, good Christians, what little reason we have to be over-solicitous for our bodies and the things of this world. Look unto Jesus Christ, *before and after his resurrection*;—He, that while he lived, was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; whom the world *despised, hated, persecuted*, and at last *crucified*; yet, being for his obedience beloved of God, was raised by him the *third day from the dead*; and then, that body which had so lately been torn and mangled by all the ways that malice or cruelty could invent, is now no longer subject to want or misery. The scourges that had ploughed his back but three days before, the crown of thorns that had pierced his temples, and the nails and spear that wounded him so unmercifully, did not in the least hinder that body from being raised in glory. And this, the Spirit of God assures us, shall be the reward of every faithful member of Jesus Christ. "This corruptible body shall put on incorruption, and this mortal body shall put on immor-

talities;" and we shall no longer be sensible of the inconveniencies of this life, nor remember the hardships we may have met with in this vale of misery.

So that you see, that we may want a great many things which the world doats on, and suffer a great many things which flesh and blood cannot easily digest, and yet be very happy after death.

And though such as are at ease and secure, at least in their own opinion, from fear of evil, may not be much affected with these considerations, yet there are, no doubt of it, millions, who, in the midst of their afflictions, do bless God for giving them *this earnest, this assurance*, of a better life after death.

To conclude then the whole:—*I may*, good Christians, every return of this season, put you in mind of these things, and you may hear them with *pleasure*, and neither you nor I be the better, unless we can be persuaded to lay them very seriously to heart; unless the belief of *the resurrection of the body* incline us to mortify the deeds of the flesh, to make our bodies fit temples of the Holy Ghost; unless we can, by this consideration, be persuaded to set our affections above, not on things on the earth, where we profess to be strangers and pilgrims; to have no abiding place, no inheritance, on this side the grave.

How infinitely does it concern every Christian here present, to lay these things to heart! Death is not far from every one of us: That very moment we shall enter upon eternity. And is it not the interest and concern of every man to have hope in his death;—to look beyond the grave with some comfortable assurance, that when God shall raise the dead, and judge the world by Jesus Christ, he will change our vile bodies, that they may be like unto his glorious body, that we may be happy both in body and soul?

Now; nothing but a *good life*, which is the consequence of a *sound faith*, can give any man this comfortable hope, and free him from the fears of what may come hereafter, —without which, *the doctrine of the resurrection* will yield us no great comfort. But then this is altogether our own fault: The omnipotent hand of God, which raised our Lord from the dead, is ready to help all such as apply to him for health and salvation, to raise them from death unto life, both here and hereafter.

Now the God of Peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, thorough the blood of the everlasting covenant, make us perfect in every good work, to do his will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory, for ever and ever.

SERMON



## S E R M O N LXXI.

E A S T E R

THE KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST  
A NECESSARY ENCOURAGEMENT TO FORSAKE SIN.

E P H E S. ii. 4, 5.

*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, &c.\**

**T**HE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY is that article of our Christian Faith, which the Church does, *at this time*, recommend to our meditation. And that we may receive it with all assurance, the resurrection of Christ is set before us in such circumstances as are sufficient to convince all such as are willing to be convinced, that CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, AND BECOME THE FIRST FRUITS OF THEM THAT SLEEP IN HIM.

And indeed, it was necessary that Christ's resurrection should be ascertained, beyond any reasonable exception, to men who were to lay down their lives for affirming the truth of it. He therefore told his disciples, before he suffered, that he was to suffer, "and that after three days he would rise again." "I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he."—A way of reasoning which our Saviour made use of on many occasions, and therefore thought it a sufficient argument,

And so did his disciples: For after they seen him when he was risen, and he had had given them all the satisfaction their scruples could suggest; and especially after he had sent down the Holy Ghost, (according to his true promise) to supply his place on earth, by which *they* were enabled to work the same miracles which he himself had done when amongst them:—This was, *to them*, a sure argument, that the hand of God was in all this;—that Jesus Christ was the beloved Son of God;—that they had not been deceived in any thing that he had *said*, or *done*, or *told* them. For they were very sure, that God could not give *his* testimony to a lie;—or require them to lay down their lives for an untruth. And therefore, when they affirmed, "That Jesus Christ was risen from the dead," they only said what they knew for certain,—what all their senses assured them of;—and therefore they did not stick to seal the truth of it *with their own blood*.

Thus the belief of the Resurrection was established. But for what end?—Was it only to convince us, that we shall be raised from the dead? Why, truly, so we may, without being the better for it. For the Spirit of God tells us, "That they that sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." So that, in truth, the Resurrection of the body is like to be no blessing to such as shall rise only to be for ever miserable.

The knowledge and belief of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, therefore, is necessary upon another account; namely, to convince us "of the exceeding greatness of the power of God to us-ward that believe;" that we may be encouraged to forsake all our evil ways, and to overcome the corruption of our nature;—since we have a power to assist us which is able to raise our dead bodies, and therefore to whom nothing is impossible.—

"God, who is rich in mercy, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ." In which words, a great many very important truths are contained or implied.

*First*; That there is a death of the soul as well as of the body.

*Secondly*; That sin is the death of the soul, and, consequently, righteousness is its life.

*Thirdly*; That there must be a spiritual Resurrection, or else the soul will remain under the power of everlasting death.

*Fourthly*; That this spiritual Resurrection can only be wrought by the mighty power of God, answerable to that which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

And the conclusion of the whole will be, —*Fifthly*; That it is through faith in this power, that a sinner is raised from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness.

\* Mark ix. 31.

b John xiii. 19.

c Dan. xii. 2.

d Eph. i. 19.

\* See John v. 24, 25. xi. 25. Rom. v. 6. vi. 4. Colof. ii. 13. 1 John iii. 14. Eph. ii. 1. v. 14. Rev. xx. 6.

And



And these are the particulars, which I pray God I may explain to your and to my own edification.

I. And, first, you will observe, *that there is a death of the soul as well as of the body.* St. Paul tells us of those that live in pleasures, "they are dead while they live."<sup>1</sup> The Father saith of his Prodigal Son, "This my son was dead, and is alive again." The Sacred Scriptures speak of wicked men, *as past feeling*; that is, having no sense of good or evil, no more than if they were dead; *as being in darkness*; not knowing whither they are going, or what will become of them. Nay, as being actually dead—"Even you being dead in your sins;" saith the Apostle.

Now, all these expressions are made use of to convince us of this truth,—That the soul is subject to death as well as the body; or rather, that the very natural state of the soul, since the fall, is a *state of death*. For we are not able of ourselves to do any thing for which we were created.

We can neither love God who made us,—nor fear him, though he can make us miserable;—though happiness is *set before us, offered to us, pressed upon us*, yet we value it no more than a dead man does dainties.

God publisheth his laws, threatens those that shall break them, executes his judgments upon transgressors;—and yet people are as insensible, and as secure, as if there were neither God nor danger.

It is for this reason, and because that men in this condition are not able to help themselves, that the Scripture speaks of men in their natural state, as of those that are dead—dead to all the purposes for which they were created.

II. And now, if we consider what has occasioned this great disorder, we shall find, that *sin*, and *sin* only, has done it. "By *sin*," saith St. Paul,<sup>2</sup> "death entered into the world;" not only natural, but *spiritual death*. And *this* is what we are most concerned to *know* and to *lay to heart*; for if we continue in a state of death, which sin has brought us into, we shall be for ever miserable without redemption. We shall neither *foresee* nor *fear* any evil, till it will be too late to prevent it.

We have too many examples of this before our eyes continually, of people who are as little concerned for what may be their lot hereafter, as those are who are *in their graves*. They confess that they are sinners, and yet are not sensible of any danger. They are told, that God, "who can destroy both body and soul in hell," is their enemy, and yet they mind it not.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. v. 6.    <sup>2</sup> Luke xv. 24.    <sup>3</sup> Rom. v. 12.

Such is the bewitching nature of sin, to those that are under the dominion of it, that it makes a man *careless* of his true interest; *blind* so that he cannot see before him; nay, as *dead* to all the purposes for which God made him, as if he had neither breath nor life.

And this is the condition of every man by nature; *this* is what *sin* has brought upon us. And it is fit we should know it, that when the Spirit of God awakens us, and raiseth us from the death of sin, we may be thankful for the mercy,—not resist his dealings with us,—but be ever after fearful of falling again into that sad state.

III. And this brings us to a *third particular*, which I proposed to explain to you. And that was *the spiritual Resurrection*, without which the soul *must* remain in a state of eternal death. And here I am very sensible that I must say very many things which many that hear me will not at all understand.

There are carnal Christians, (as well as there were carnal Jews) who, when they hear of *rising from the dead*, think of nothing but of the death and resurrection of the body.

Now, the death of the body is soon over. It is *eternal death* that we ought to be most concerned to escape. And, in order to this, the soul is to be raised from the death of sin unto a life of righteousness, or else both will be miserable. This is what the Holy Scripture presses upon us in very many places, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *first resurrection*; that is, from the death of sin. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above."<sup>4</sup>

In short; this is the end of all religion:—To restore men to the likeness an dissimilitude of God, from which they are fallen.

But, that you may better understand what is meant by a *spiritual resurrection*, I must put you in mind of the condition we are in, and how we came into this condition.

Man was *at first* created *in the image* of God,—in righteousness and true holiness; that is, he was able to act conformably to any law which God would think fit to give him. We are very sure that it is not so now with us. The Holy Scriptures, *and they only*, can inform us how this came to pass; and they tell us,<sup>5</sup> that man being thus created, there was a covenant of life immortal made with him, by which his natural appetites being restrained, he might the better improve himself in all virtue, until God should think fit to translate him from earth to heaven.

<sup>4</sup> Coloss. iii. 1.    <sup>5</sup> Gen. ii. 16.



Now man having *free will*, and consequently a power of choosing *evil* as well as *good*, instead of *improving* in virtue, he gave way to his appetites, he broke the Covenant, by which he and his posterity became subject to sin and death;—for the Spirit of God forsook him, and instead of an immortal race, we are assured<sup>1</sup> “that he begat a Son “after his own image,” not after the image of God, “but in his *own* likeness;” that is, with such a corrupt and depraved nature as his own was *now* become.

Now, that this is the very condition of all the posterity of Adam, is plain from experience. And we are so far departed from *original righteousness*, that we are utterly incapable of conforming to *any the most reasonable law* that God has set us. And those that think—that reason is sufficient to lead us to, and keep us in the right way, are guilty of a *double error*.

They suppose, for example,—*First*, that men are generally governed by reason, whereas they are rather governed by their passions. *Secondly*; They must suppose, that men are capable of attending constantly to what is fit to be done: Now it is found by experience, that they *are not*;—that we do not always follow the dictates of our understanding;—and that we violate laws which we are *convinced* are good.

We must, therefore, take the Scripture account of our *fall*,—of our *weakness*,—of our *blindness*,—of our utter incapacity of being restored to the image of God, by any thing we can do.

For *this* is the *spiritual resurrection* we are speaking of, and without which God can take no pleasure in us, until *his image, his likeness*, is recovered in the soul; that is, “until “Christ be formed within us;”<sup>\*</sup>—until we have got the mastery over our *corrupt affections*, so as not to be led by them;—until we delight in doing that which is good;—until the love of God become a law to us.

This, I say, is the *spiritual resurrection*; this is the life of righteousness, to which we must be restored before we leave this world, or we shall remain under the power of *everlasting death, of everlasting misery*.

IV. But how is this to be effected? Why, *only by the mighty power of God, answerable to that which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*. “God, who is rich in mercy, for the “great love wherewith he loved us, even “when we were dead in sins, has quickened “us together with him, and has raised us up “together.” For he that raised up Jesus from the dead can restore whom he will to life, whether they be dead in a *natural* or in a *spiritual* sense.

<sup>1</sup> Gen. v. 3.

<sup>\*</sup> Gal. iv. 19.

In order to *this*, every Christian has the earnest of the Spirit given him in baptism,—even the same Spirit that raised up Christ from the dead. But forasmuch as we are to be dealt with as reasonable creatures, and are not to be carried to Heaven against our will, therefore we have *this* rule given us;—To him that hath, (that is, who hath made use of the grace of God) he shall have still more grace; and from him that hath not made use of God’s grace, from *him* shall be taken what he had at first.

This shews the reason why some, notwithstanding the earnest of God’s Spirit, continue still amongst the dead, whilst others are raised to life and happiness.

This shews the necessity of applying constantly to God for new supplies of grace, as well as for pardon of the sins we commit, which might otherwise provoke him to withdraw his Spirit from us.

Lastly; this shews the necessity of walking warily, lest Satan get an advantage over us, and bring us back into a state of sin and death.

In short; it is God that worketh in us both to *will*, and to *do*, of his own good pleasure.

But then he expects, when he has wrought in us *this will*, and given us a power; he then requires of us, *that we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling*; that is, with a concern suitable to the work we are about. He requires, for instance, that we should do what we *can*, and that we should be *sincere*.

Our outward actions are generally in our own power. I cannot perhaps, all at once, cure myself of envy, but I can speak well of people, and I *can* too take care not to speak ill of them. I cannot serve God with that love and devotion he requires, but I can attend his service, I can hear his word, I can speak of him with reverence. My own conscience tells me, that this is in my own power; and when I do this out of a sense of duty, I may depend upon it, God will give me those good dispositions which I wished for, and in order to obtain *which*, I performed that external righteousness before spoken of.

But I have reserved, to the *last place*, that which of all others is the most *powerful* and *effectual* means of recovering the image of God in us;—of raising us from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness;—and that is,

V. *A steadfast faith in the power of God, which raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.*

For, in the resurrection of Christ, the omnipotence of God is set before us in the



most lively manner. And Christians are exhorted to have their eye on *this* more especially; "That like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Or, as St. Peter expresses it,<sup>1</sup> "That we may be begotten again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead;"—for nothing is impossible to him who can raise the dead.

And no man who sincerely believes this article can, without great hypocrisy, say—I would be better if I could, but I am not able to overcome my corruptions. What, not by *his* assistance who raised up Christ from the dead?

Let us rather take shame to ourselves, and confess, that we have no mind to be reformed, or to have the image of God restored in us; for God (you confess with your own mouth) is *able* to do it. And there cannot be a greater assurance given us that he is *willing*, than by the resurrection of Christ. For by *that* we are assured, that God is reconciled to his poor creatures, for whom Christ died, provided *they* will be reconciled to the means which *he* has appointed for their recovery.

Now, matters being thus, as indeed they are, a sinner may with some heart *set about his conversion*. He knows he is *dead*, but God can raise the dead to life again. He cannot help himself; but he can ask help of one that is mighty to save. He meets still with new difficulties in the way of his recovery; but he knows, that God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear. In short; if a man is sincere, he knows for certain, that the same power and goodness, which raised him from the death of sin, can and will preserve him to eternal life, if he is not wanting to himself.

So that neither his own natural weakness, nor the power of his adversaries, nor the difficulties he is to undergo, nor the miscarriages he is guilty of, ought to discourage him, since his hope is in God, who raiseth the dead.

But then, if his faith and hope be in God, he must follow God's directions, and make use of that power which God gives him to work out his salvation with fear and trembling; and then his faith will not fail him, but will most certainly restore him to the image of God, which consists in righteousness and true holiness, and which is the life of the soul, and without which the soul must be eternally miserable.

This, good Christians, is *the Spiritual Resurrection*, without which the belief of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Peter i. 3.

the resurrection of the body will be a very *uncomfortable article*.

Here is life and death set before us. The death of our bodies *cannot* be prevented by all our care. However, Jesus Christ having conquered death, and having taken away its sting, death cannot be very terrible to any Christian who has reason to hope for a blessed resurrection.

Well then, since we *cannot* escape *temporal death*, our great concern ought to be, that by the grace of God, we may escape *eternal death*.

And this is the end and design of religion. And few people can be easy without so much religion as they hope will make them happy when they die.

In the mean time, it is not so well considered as it should be, that all religion is *vain*, which does not *renew us in the spirit of our mind*; which does not restore us to the image of God, in which man was at first created.

We may receive the Gospel, and we may pretend to believe it:—Yes; just as the generality of the Jews did the law of Moses. They were circumcised, they kept the Passover, they offered sacrifices as the law appointed, and by these things they hoped to be justified, that is, accepted of God. This was *their* righteousness, of which our Saviour says expressly, that if *our* righteousness does not exceed *theirs*, we can by no means enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.

Pray, let us consider in what our righteousness does exceed *theirs*:—Do we love God more sincerely than *they* did? Do we strive to glorify him in our lives? Do we live in an humble dependance upon him without murmuring, as they did, at his dispensations? Are we more obedient to our Governors? Is our conversation such as becomes the Gospel of Christ? Do we find a principle in our minds which obliges us to do (and that willingly) whatever we believe will please God, and to avoid whatever we suspect will offend him? If it be thus with us, why then *we have passed from death unto life*; the new man is raised up in us, and the spirit of God is fitting us for a blessed eternity.

But if we only mind the letter of the Gospel, and satisfy ourselves with observing its outward ordinances;—if we pray out of custom only, and go to the Lord's Table, because we would not be singular;—if we do not become thereby more holy in our lives, better men, better neighbours, better Christians;—why then we are still in darkness, in the very shadow of death, in the very way to destruction.

You see then, good Christians, that as ever we hope for a *blessed resurrection*, we must first *pass from death unto life here*. He that has



has not a share in this *first resurrection*, will have but little comfort in the hopes of the second.

Now, the Devil will endeavour to divert you from setting about, and going through this necessary work, *by two very contrary methods*:—Either he will try to make you *presumptuous and careless*, by representing it as the easiest thing in the world;—or to make you *despair*, by representing it to be a work far above your ability.

Now, our blessed Lord's *death and resurrection* has a sanctifying power to cure us both of *presumption* and *despair*.

If a Christian thinks with himself—God is very merciful,—I will depend upon his goodness;—Christ died for me,—I am called by his name,—I have been often at his table,—he gives me liberty to call God my Father, and as such I pray to him;—why should I not be confident of my future happiness?—I will tell you why you should not. Because our Lord himself saith, that many (at the Day of Judgment) will have all this to say for themselves, and yet *he will not own them*. And pray consider, that if sin is so harmless a thing, and so very easy to be mastered, why did Christ undergo such agonies, such conflicts, in subduing it?

And if you fancy that *now* Christ requires nothing of us, pray why do his Apostles speak so much of mortification and self-denial, of taking the Cross, of crucifying the flesh, nay, of dying to sin? Do you think there is nothing like *this* to be undergone by a Christian before Christ is formed in him,—before he riseth from the death of sin unto the life of righteousness? You will be sadly mistaken if you think so. Hear what St. Paul saith,<sup>1</sup> “Jesus Christ gave himself for us;”—but to what end? Why; “that he might deliver us from this present evil world;—that he might redeem us from our vain conversation;—that we being dead unto sin, might live unto God;—that he might purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.”

When you consider this, you will be convinced, that Christianity is a very serious

thing; and that Christians have something to do, besides performing a bare outward part in religion.

But then, some people are naturally serious and thoughtful; and these the wicked spirit does often tempt to despair, by setting before them *the difficulties of a Christian life*.—That it is impossible to overcome our corruptions; that it is to no purpose to set about it; and if the whole world lieth in wickedness, what hopes have *we* to get free of it? Why, we have an Almighty power ready to help us;—the same power which raised Jesus Christ from the dead:—Nothing can be impossible or difficult to *Him* who could do *that*.

But if it be really so, (you will say) *Why are there few that be saved?* Why; because they *will not* go unto Christ that they may have life; they *will not* believe, because they *will not* part with their sins.

But may I be sure that his goodness will receive one who has so much offended him?

Why, do you think that *that divine Shepherd*, who with so much care and pains sought his lost sheep, and laid it on his shoulders,—that *he* will refuse one that cries after him, and moans to be taken care of?

Do you think that he would lay down his life for his sheep, and after that neglect them, and suffer them to be devoured by wolves?

Hear what the Prophet Isaiah<sup>m</sup> saith of this good Shepherd, so long before his incarnation:—“He shall feed his flock like a Shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young,”

Here then is our comfort:—If while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us;—if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son,—much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life, since he now ever liveth to make intercession for us.

Now, thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom be glory and honour, now and for ever. *Amen.*

<sup>1</sup> Gal. i. 4.

<sup>m</sup> Isaiah xl. 11.



## S E R M O N LXXII.

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM ILLUSTRATED AND PRACTICALLY APPLIED.

H E B. xi. 8.

*By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.*

THERE would be but little comfort in believing that there will be a Resurrection of the dead, if at the same time there were no possibility of knowing whether we shall be happy or miserable in the life to come. And therefore, as soon as *life* and *immortality* were brought to light by the Gospel, and men were assured that they were to rise again, it was at the same time made known to them, by what means they might provide for, and live in a comfortable hopes of a blessed resurrection.

And because the Jews, to whom the Gospel was first preached, did very well know the life and behaviour of their father Abraham, and how acceptable he was to God,—the faith of Abraham is often commended in the New Testament, and proposed to *them*, and to all Christians, to be imitated, as the only way to be secure of the favour of God in this world, and in the world to come;—without which, life itself, *to a thoughtful man*, would be a burthen, and the knowledge of a life to come an insupportable burthen.

Now, the case of Abraham, as it is represented in the text, was this:—He was commanded by God, (in order to preserve him from idolatry) to leave his kindred and his father's house;<sup>o</sup> and God, at the same time, promised *to bless him, and to make him a great nation*. Accordingly he went forth, out of his own country, *not knowing whither he went*, but he was “fully persuaded that what God had promised, he was able also to perform.” He therefore cast his whole care upon God, resolving to obey him *in every thing*, by which faith he became dear to, and was called *the friend of, God*.

Now this, as the Apostle saith expressly,<sup>q</sup> “was written for our sake, to whom the like faith shall be imputed for righteousness, if we believe in him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

A thoughtful man can hardly read this account of Abraham, without observing, that

<sup>o</sup> Gen. xii. 1.    <sup>p</sup> Rom. iv. 21.    <sup>q</sup> Rom. iv. 24.

this is the case of all good men who live and die in the true faith and fear of God. They know not what shall befall them while they live;—they know not the place whither they go when they die;—and yet, depending upon the promise of God in Jesus Christ, they leave their country, their friends, their estates, and their very bodies, and go cheerfully into an unknown world,—in hopes of a blessed resurrection, and a better inheritance.

Do people then consider what they do when they neglect to know and to possess their hearts with *saving faith*? Or do *they* consider the mischief they do, who make this grace more difficult to be understood than God designed; hindering the greatest part of mankind from rightly apprehending *that*, without which it is impossible to please God?

Since then there will be a resurrection both of the just and unjust;—since the belief of this cannot but be very afflicting where men are destitute of *saving faith*;—and since the doctrine of the resurrection is a most comfortable article to all such *as have believed, and are careful to maintain good works*;—it will be very proper to consider the nature of that faith by which this doctrine may be applied to the consciences of all sorts of hearers;—

That such as think of the resurrection, and a life to come, with fear, may know the reason of it, and how to make their minds easy, and their condition safe;—

That such as hope well for themselves may know whether they have reason to be secure and cheerful;—

And, lastly, that such as are indifferent and live at all adventures may be convinced, that although the happiness of man depends upon his faith, yet the not believing the truths of the Gospel will not make these truths void. For instance:—We *shall* all rise from the dead, and appear before the judgment seat of Christ, though all the world should resolve not to believe this.

That



That these things may be made as plain as may be to your understandings, I will endeavour,

*First*; To give you a short and *practical* account of Faith, as it is contained in the Holy Scriptures.

*Secondly*; To shew that this is that very faith which made Abraham so dear to God, and was imputed unto him for righteousness, and will be so imputed to us, if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.

*Lastly*; We shall consider, how the doctrine of the resurrection may *by this faith* be applied to the consciences of all men, in order to *comfort*, to *amend*, or to *awaken* them, as their case requires.

I. FAITH, then, is a *firm* assent to whatever God has revealed,—that is, made known to us,—*for this reason*, because it is from God.

Now, the last way God was pleased to take to make himself and his will known to us, and to leave all men to whom the Gospel has been preached without excuse, was *this*:—He sent his only Son into the world to take our nature upon him, who, to convince us that he came from God, did such things as none but God can do;—he healed the sick;—he gave sight to the blind;—he raised the dead to life again;—and all this with a word of his mouth:—And lastly, having suffered himself to be put to death, he rose the third day from the dead.

By all which he gave sufficient proof,—*that he came forth from God*; and that the doctrine which he taught *was of God*: And all such *as with all their heart* believe the truths which he taught *as coming from God*, have that faith which is sufficient for their salvation.

The most necessary truths which he delivered are *these*:—

*First*; That God would have all men to be *saved*.<sup>\*</sup> So that there is no room left for any man living to doubt of God's good-will towards him.

*Secondly*; That he will require a strict account of men according to the favours he has bestowed upon them; they must therefore expect to be dealt with *in justice*, and not hope for favour where he has not promised to shew mercy.

*Thirdly*; That notwithstanding this, men have no reason to be discouraged, because God will be pleased with what we can do, if we do it in *sincerity*; that is, with a desire of pleasing God to the best of our power. He has therefore declared, that in the first

place, *we should not sin*; but because even they that mean well may be overtaken and fall into sin, he has therefore provided a remedy for that: "If any man sin, we have "an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ "the righteous; and he is the propitiation "for our sins."<sup>\*</sup> That is, God, for Christ's sake, will be reconciled to those that have not done their duty, *upon their true repentance*. More than this the heart of man should not desire.

*Fourthly*; And because the more *thoughtful* men are, the more sensible they are of their own weakness and inability to do what is required of them, in order to their eternal happiness, God has promised that his Holy Spirit shall assist such as desire to work out their own salvation.<sup>\*</sup>

And *lastly*; To make us mind these things more carefully, he has made known to us thus much of the state after death: "All "that are in the graves shall come forth; "they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done "evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."

Now, to believe these things, because God has made them known to us, is called FAITH. But then we are to consider, that one may believe all this without any manner of advantage. "The devils believe, and "tremble." Simon Magus believed the Apostle's words; Acts viii. Even at the great day many will say unto Jesus Christ, *Have we not preached in thy name?*

Therefore, *saving faith* is such a belief of these things as makes a man live so as if he *did indeed* believe them. "For faith, (faith St. James ii. 17.) "without works, is dead." For instance:—I believe that God will pardon *all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him*; but then this faith will stand me in no stead, if, notwithstanding I know this, I neglect to turn unto God, "and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance."

I may assent unto this truth, that the *commands of God are holy, just, and good*. But yet that which is good will be made *death unto me*, and be an occasion of a greater condemnation, if I continue in sin under so gracious a dispensation.

I may know, that "God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." But what will this belief profit me, if the ambassadors of Christ beseech me to be reconciled unto God, and I shut my ears, and go on in my rebellion?

What though I am persuaded, that *in the presence of God* (where the righteous shall be admitted) *there is fullness of joy, and plea-*

<sup>\*</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 4.

<sup>\*</sup> 1 John ii. 1. <sup>\*</sup> Phil. ii. 12. <sup>\*</sup> John v. 23.



*sure for evermore*, Will this avail me, do you suppose, if I strive not to make my calling and election sure, by purifying my soul, by keeping my body undefiled, that I may be thought worthy to be admitted into the company of Saints and Angels?

Lastly; I may believe, and be fully persuaded, that the portion of the wicked will hereafter be, *weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth*. But what signifies it that I know and believe this, if my faith will not oblige me to *forfake the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season*?

From which instances we may be instructed in this great truth, that as true faith is a principle of new life, in every one that has it, so it may easily be seen both by him that has it, and by others.

II. To make this more plain, we shall in the second place see, that *this is that faith which made Abraham so dear to God, and was imputed unto him for righteousness; and will be so to every one of us, if we believe on him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*.

We are assured, that God never left himself without witness, since the world began. People knew, or might have known, that he who made all things, and kept the world in order, was infinite in *power*, in *wisdom*, and in *goodness*. But the world had so far corrupted itself, that all such as knew this were not ready to act according to this belief; and therefore God did not make his will known, nor promises of favours, but to such as he knew would fear him, and teach others to do so. Accordingly, he chose Abraham, and his seed, on whom he purposed to bestow very great favours.

But to try his obedience, and whether he was worthy of such favours, and that his faith might be a standard for his posterity to imitate, God was pleased to take this method with him:—He commands him to leave his kindred and his father's house; he immediately obeyed, *and went forth, not knowing whither he went*; only this he knew and believed, that if God commanded him to leave his own country, he would find him a better, because he had promised to bless him *wherever* he went. If God encouraged him to hope for a son, when both he and his wife were as good as dead with respect to issue of their own bodies, yet he doubted not but God could bring it to pass. If God after this commanded him to sacrifice this very son, whom he had promised to make a great nation, yet still he obeyed, *accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead*.<sup>a</sup>

In short, whatever God commanded, he was resolved to do, however disagreeable it

<sup>a</sup> Heb. xi. 17.

was to his natural reason or passions. He knew that infinite wisdom and goodness could not command any thing which in the end would not be of advantage to him if he obeyed. He knew that infinite power could bring to pass whatever he promised.

So that by often reflecting upon these perfections of God, and by exercising himself frequently in acts of self-denial, obedience, and submission to the pleasure of God, he at last brought himself to such a disposition, as to depend upon God, and to observe his commands, however strange and uneasy to flesh and blood; which does well explain that saying of St. James:—"By works his faith was made perfect;" that is, by using himself to obey, at last he found nothing too hard for him to submit to.

And thus his faith became exemplary, and a standard of what will be acceptable to God, not only to the Jews, his own posterity, but also to us Christians, even to the end of the world.

And by comparing our faith with this standard, we may be able to see how far we come short of being so well esteemed of God.

And let us be well assured, that if we have not this faith, we shall have reason to repent of it; for trials we shall meet with as sure as we live, *as well as Abraham did*; and he will be a very unhappy person who knows not where to flee for comfort when troubles come upon him.

And though a man should find ways to divert himself;—to despise things that are afflictions to others,—to receive disappointments and losses with patience or unconcernedness, which yet is very hard to do without faith in God,—yet still *this thought*, (if ever it comes into the heart) *What will become of me when I die?* will damp the pleasures of life, and make those that are most unconcerned, to wish that they had some security that the next life would not be worse than this: And yet no man living can be sure of this, but he that is blessed with a true and lively faith in God's mercies through Jesus Christ.

And though most Christians, who are in any measure serious, do hope that they have this faith, yet it is much to be feared, that people do often deceive themselves, though it concerns us above all things not to be mistaken.

And those that will be at the pains of asking themselves a few questions, will be better able to judge how well their faith is grounded, and whether it will be able to support them in the day of affliction, and

<sup>a</sup> Chap. ii. 22.

particularly



particularly at the hour of death, for then we shall have most need of it. For instance:—Let me ask myself, what sort of confidence had I in my Father when I was a child, and before I was corrupted by evil habits or examples? Did I ever question his love for *me*? Did not I love *him* even when he corrected me? Did not I lay all my complaints and little sorrows before him? &c. And then let me see whether I behave myself so towards God.

But if, instead of doing so, I am ready to question the kindness and good-will of God, as often as he suffers any thing to come cross upon me;—if in poverty I am apt to despair;—if I faint in the day of adversity, as if I had no helper;—if I forget who it is that took me from my mother's womb, and has taken care of me ever since;—then is not my faith plainly such as it ought to be,—such as will support me when I shall be sure to want it.

A man who is in good circumstances, and finds his heart thankful and chearful in the enjoyment of God's good blessings, will be apt, at such a time, to think that such a disposition must sure proceed from a sound faith in God. But then is the proper time to ask one's-self this question: What should I be, if I were stript of all these good things, and exposed to a wicked and unmerciful world? And yet it is the same just and good God who brings such things to pass, and often *even thus* visits his best servants, and those whom he designs to honour with glory and immortality.

But for what end does God afflict those whom he loves? For what end? Why, to try *their* love for Him;—to punish those sins here which must be punished either here or hereafter;—to make them less fond of this world, which is not the world they were made for;—to train them up, by teaching them, in these lesser instances, to trust on him at the hour of death. And sometimes to make them examples to others, of the power of faith in them that are perfect.

I know it is ungrateful and uneasy to flesh and blood, to be put upon asking such questions as these;—but a good physician does not always regard the ease, but the safety of his patient. And self-examination, we know, is as necessary in spiritual concerns as enquiries of any other kind.

Let me therefore ask,—Do you believe the truth of our Saviour's sermon on the mount?—You wonder why that should be questioned of any Christian. Why; are you really satisfied, that men under afflictions and in pain can be happy and rejoice, and for this very reason, because they are in affliction? Are you fully persuaded, that

any thing can make a man think himself more happy, because he is evil spoken of, reviled, belied, and persecuted? And yet this is part of our Blessed Saviour's sermon: “Blessed are they that mourn.” “Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in Heaven.”

But if you still say you believe all this, let me beseech you to try your faith by your works, before you are too sure that your faith is as it should be. You will have occasions enough, *depend on it*, of exercising your faith.

It pleaseth God to open your eyes, and to give you a very sensible sight of the danger of your sins:—This extremely afflicts and terrifies you. Do you think yourself happy under these sorrows? Are you well pleased that God takes care of you? Are you resolved to make the best use of this chastisement? If you are not, why then, in truth, you do not believe—that *they that mourn are happy*.

If any body should be so wicked as to misrepresent your best actions, or to treat you ill because you will not do as the world would have you, are you prepared to bear it with patience? Are you resolved not to return evil for evil? If it should be in your power, would you not revenge yourself?—If you believe Christ's sermon; he affirmed,—that they are certainly *happy who are persecuted for righteousness sake*; that is, while they are in the way of their duty. And a firm persuasion that this is true, will make you bear grief with patience, suffering wrongfully, knowing that a short affliction for God's sake will be well rewarded in a very short time.

But how must we attain to such a degree of Faith as will enable us to do this? Why, just as we must obtain any other grace, namely, by praying to God, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift;—by accustoming ourselves to go to him upon all occasions for what we want;—by giving him thanks for his favours, and acknowledging, at all times, his power, his wisdom, his goodness, and his truth;—by trusting in God's providence while we live, and casting our care upon Him who careth for us: By which means we shall gain such an habit of faith, as will be sufficient to enable us to think of death with comfort, and to look beyond the grave with hopes of a much better life than this we leave.

III. And this brings us to the third particular:—To consider how the doctrine of the resurrection may, by this faith, be applied to the consciences of all sorts of people,

in



in order to *amend*, or to *awaken*, or to *comfort* them, as their case shall require.

That some men have not the knowledge of God, but indeed live as if there were no God, or that there was no account to be given hereafter, is a sad truth, but too plain to be questioned.—What methods shall we take to convince such,—what way to awaken them? Shall we preach to them Jesus and the Resurrection? Why, truly, these are awakening arguments, where people are disposed to receive the truth.

But what shall we say to those that will not trouble themselves with these things?—All that we can do is to pray them to consider, that the truth of these things does not depend upon our believing, or our not caring for them. If God *will* raise the dead, and judge all men by Jesus Christ, and give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings, this *will* come to pass, though all the world should resolve not to think of it.

Let them make the experiment in cases of less moment:—Let them try whether their not believing that temporal evils shall come upon them, will keep them from afflictions of that kind;—whether those that never think of death, till it overtake them as a snare, whether *they* are ever the farther from it?

Now, that there will be a Resurrection, and a Judgment, and everlasting rewards and punishments, as men shall have deserved, is as *plain* and *certain* to the eye of faith, as it is to the eye of sense and reason, that we shall all die. So that whether they hear, or whether they forbear, a time will come when they will be convinced of these truths. God grant it may not be too late for them to make a good use of their knowledge!

But sure we may hope to do more good upon those that every day *profess to believe these truths*:—At least, they will hear with more patience the consequences of such a belief.

There is a curiosity in many people which leads them to enquire what their fortune and condition may be ten or twenty years to come; and foolish people have not stuck at very unwarrantable methods for finding this out: And yet, *which is very strange*, this curiosity does not carry them farther,—To ask, for instance, what may be my lot and portion an hundred years hence? And yet, if any part of me is to have a being then, it concerns me as much that it should be a well-being, as that I should have good fortunes for a few years to come.

But this plainly shews us, that the former sort of curiosity is from that evil spirit,

who would not have us to carry our enquiries too far, lest the sight of the next world should draw us from his service in this.

On the other hand, the good Spirit of God is ever pressing upon us the thoughts and the belief of the life to come, in order to prepare us for it; and bidding us not mind, at least not set our hearts upon, a world which we must so soon leave, and a life so full of sorrows and uncertainty.

Which of these spirits shall we hearken to? I will lay before you the consequences of both, and leave you to judge.

If our hearts, our thoughts, and hopes, are set upon this world, and we mind but very little the life to come, why then death, which we cannot put from us very long, will strip us of every thing which we counted valuable. Let a man be never so much feared or beloved in this world, the very moment of death, he has neither friend, nor estate, nor followers, that can help him.

On the other side, if I have thought much of the world to come, and have endeavoured to lay up my treasure there, and to secure the friendship of the blessed inhabitants of Paradise, by fitting myself for such worthy company; I shall just value this world as much as it deserves while I stay in it, and be ready, and well pleased, to leave it, when God commands me to depart out of it, as Abraham was to leave his country, when by faith he was sure of a better.

But he, who would be sure of comfort when he comes to die, must be sure to strengthen his faith in God while he lives,—by depending upon his promises,—by obeying his commands,—by submitting to his discipline,—and by meditating upon his perfections. This will make the thoughts and the approach of death very easy to us, which otherwise would be very terrible, to go one knows not whither, and without hopes of being happy.

Therefore, if any of you, who now hear me, are uneasy at the repeating of this article, *I believe a Resurrection, and everlasting Life after death*;—if you are inclined to wish that this may not be true;—why then, be sure, that your condition is not safe, and it would be cruelty to let you be quiet.

For the doctrine of the Resurrection is indeed full of comfort to such as have accustomed themselves to think of the next life, and have endeavoured to prepare themselves for it.

The *poor*, who have lived on God's providence, have reason to believe, that when they shall rise again, there will an amend be made them for what they wanted here.

The



The *afflicted*, who have patiently waited their change, are sure, that then God will wipe away all tears.

Every *faithful servant of God* is in hopes, and has good reason for it, that God, who has seen his sincerity, his serious sorrow for his offences, his vows of amendment, and his constant endeavour to keep them; that God, who knows that he has been careful, *according to his ability and circumstances*, to understand the will of God, and to perform it;—and lastly, that he has cheerfully chosen and made use of the means of grace which God has afforded him;—that God, who knows all this, will, according to his goodness, and covenant, and promises, *take care of him* when he dies and is no longer able to help himself;—that God will make the next life much happier than that he is going to leave; and, being the Lord of all places, and conditions, and powers, will defend him from the terrors of death, from the spirits and powers of darkness, and bring him, in his own good time, to that happiness he has all along hoped and prayed for, even to his everlasting kingdom.

Had Abraham, when he went forth, *not knowing whither he went*, had he wanted that faith for which he is so much commended; that is, had he not believed that God (who alone was able to do it) would have kept him in the way he went,—he would, no question of it, have gone forth very uncomfortably.

And will not this be the case of every soul here present, and that within a very few years? Shall we not all leave our bodies, our friends, and the places of our abode, to go to a world which we know very little of?

And shall not we endeavour to have some tolerable security that God, *at that time*, will not forsake us, nor leave us to the power and malice of evil spirits, to torment, and to punish us?

I only add, *that it will come to this*; and therefore, for God's sake, let us think of it before that day comes, before “the night cometh when no man can work.”

But are we sure that our labour will not be in vain; but that we shall *attain the end of our faith,—the salvation of our souls*?

What more assurance would we have, besides what God has already given us? The rich man in hell, who had lived and died in infidelity, could not think of any surer way of convincing his five brothers that were yet living, than that one should go from the dead to warn them, “lest they also come into that place of torment;” for then, faith he, *they will believe*.—And has not God vouchsafed us this very evidence of the terrors and the joys of the world to come?

Ought not the remembrance of Christ's resurrection from the dead to satisfy, to convince, and to leave us without excuse if we will not believe, that God has determined *we shall all rise again*,—they that have done good, or having done amiss, and have repented in time, to life everlasting; and they that have done evil unto everlasting misery.

And if we do indeed believe this, I need not tell you what effects this faith will have upon us; we shall live, and we shall die, like Christians, full of hopes of a blessed immortality with Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom, with the Father &c.

## S E R M O N LXXIII.

Preached before the Queen, at St. James's, on HOLY THURSDAY, May 10, 1711.

### THE INFLUENCE WHICH CHRIST'S ASCENSION OUGHT TO HAVE ON THE LIVES OF CHRISTIANS.

M A T T H. vi. 21.

*Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.*

**T**HOUGH our Saviour applies this Proverb to the good or ill use men make of riches; intimating, that they who have laid up a *treasure in Heaven*, by being bountiful to the poor, will be best pleased when they are thinking of Heaven, or doing what may bring them thither; *for the heart will be most there, where we believe we have the greatest interest*; yet it is justly applicable to

all the objects of our hopes and desires; that is, we shall always be most delighted with the thoughts of such places, and persons, and employments, as we apprehend may most contribute to our happiness, and from which we have, or expect to have, the greatest advantage.

It is *this* which the church had most in view, when the service for this Festival was composed:



composed;—not barely to bring to our remembrance, that JESUS CHRIST, as on this day, *ascended into Heaven*, but to *instruct our practice*, and to put us in mind of the influence this part of the Gospel History ought to have upon our lives. To tell us, if we believe that Jesus Christ is ascended into the Heavens, there to intercede with God, and to prepare a place for us; that we should have this much in our minds, and at heart; that we should follow him thither with our best affections, and with him continually dwell. And (because of ourselves we cannot do this) to teach and to oblige us, at least upon every return of this season, to pray, *that our hearts and minds may be in Heaven, where our Lord Jesus Christ is gone before us*. He being our greatest treasure, and the fountain of all our happiness.

Now, that our *understandings* and *affections* may keep pace together, that when we are bid “to seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God;” that the reason of the thing may affect us, as well as the authority of him that bids us do so, it will be fit to consider,—*What good we may hope for from our Saviour's presence in Heaven?*—Why our hearts should be *there* rather than any where else?—Why we should have *Him*, and his *glory*, and *authority*, most in our eye?—What will be the *real advantages* of such a conversation?—And, lastly, what will be the consequence of placing our hearts and affections elsewhere? All which we may consider under these two heads:—

First, *What interest or treasure we have in Heaven, and how the consideration of that ought to affect us?*

Secondly, *The motives, the consequence, and the danger, of fixing our hearts elsewhere.*

I. And indeed, there are many reasons why *our hearts should be in Heaven*; but that which of all others is the most likely to affect us, is this,—that Jesus Christ is *there*, and in such glorious circumstances, as must at once oblige us to *think* of him with satisfaction, to *serve* him with pleasure, and to *desire* to follow his steps and directions in the way which leads to that blessed place.

For, first, he is there *as a Prince*, to whom all power is given both in Heaven and in Earth; *Angels, and Principalities, and Powers, being made subject unto him*. The consequence of this is, he will govern the world, as with the greatest authority, so with the greatest wisdom, justice, and goodness; that neither the wickedness of men, nor the power or malice of devils, shall hinder or disturb the great ends of his government,—*the Glory of God, and the Good of the whole Creation*.

And though we cannot always account for the ways of his Providence, nor indeed is it fit we should,—we are not let into the councils of earthly princes;—yet we are sure, it will one day appear, that *justice* has been executed impartially upon *men*, upon *families*, upon *kingdoms*;—that all, even the most surprising and melancholy events, have been foreseen and directed to ends worthy of the wisdom of God;—and that his *mercy* and *goodness* was there where we have been most apt to suspect his love.

Thus we are sure it ever *will be*; because, wherever we have been able to see *the reason of things*, thus it *always has been*. He has governed the world with a powerful and steady hand;—he has kept the ambitious within the bounds appointed them;—called those to an account, whom no power on earth could bring into judgment. He has brought the counsel of the wicked to nought;—has received the petitions, pitied the complaints, and has eased the grievances, of such as could have none to hear, none to help them on this side Heaven.

In short; it is by virtue of *Christ's authority at the right hand of God*, that he keeps the world from being only a place of disorder, of oppression and cruelty, of confusion and misery.

Here then is matter of real concern and advantage to us, and therefore matter of real joy,—that we have in Heaven a security against all our fears, whether for the publick, for our friends, or for ourselves. That nothing can befall us, without the knowledge, without the direction, or permission, of our Prince and Saviour. That he may, indeed, suffer his judgments to be in the world, *that the inhabitants of the earth may learn righteousness*;—that we may deserve evils, and bring them upon ourselves;—that we may be forced to suffer here, to prevent greater sufferings hereafter. But then all this is manifestly for the good of the world, as well as for the glory of God.

And the conclusion will be, that our *faith*, and *hope*, and *confidence*, should be, where our only help is, *in Heaven*;—that our eyes should be upon *Him*, who rules the world in righteousness, when we know not what to do ourselves;—that neither the vicegerents of Christ, nor their subjects, need to take unjustifiable ways to support their government or interests, while He sitteth at the right hand of God, who is “the fountain of all justice and power;”—that we need not advance principles destructive of Christianity, to bring about our designs, if they are really such as become the subjects and servants of Jesus Christ to be concerned in;—that such as are *highest in power* should

not



not despise their fellow-creatures, since there is *One* that is *higher than they*, who takes cognizance of their actions;—and that such as have no power to help themselves ought not to despair, since justice will be done, and an amends made them, either here or hereafter, for what they have lost or suffered for righteousness' sake. Lastly; that if we be careful to do our duty, and to leave events, where they ought to be, in the hands of him who governs the world, we may depend on it, all will be well for us, and ordered for the best.

*Secondly*; JESUS CHRIST is at the right hand of God, as the head of his Church. "God," saith the Apostle,\* "God hath set him at his own right hand, far above all principality and power, and might, and domination, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the Church;" that is, for the benefit of the Church, "*which is his body.*"

The consequence of this has been,—Jesus Christ, after his ascension, according to his true promise, sent down the Holy Ghost from Heaven, who in a most wonderful manner inspired and enabled the APOSTLES OF CHRIST, and their successors, to plant the GOSPEL OF TRUTH in the world; not by fantastical appearances and false prophecies, but by real and undoubted miracles, by true and substantial fruits of holiness, in their own, and in the lives of those they converted. By which means we, amongst many other nations, were brought out of darkness and error into the clear light and true knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ.

And though, for ends best known to his infinite wisdom, he afterwards suffered ignorance, errors, and even gross idolatry, to overspread a great part of the church; yet, in great goodness, he was pleased to forewarn his faithful servants of the approaching darkness, of the coming of Antichrist, and of his destruction; and this by undoubted prophecies, which have been, and are to be, fulfilled in their season.

By which means, such as feared God, and acquainted themselves with his word, were preserved from idolatry, and continued a church in the midst of such darkness and persecutions, as no power but that of God could have hindered, that the gates of Hell had not prevailed against it; till at last, the REFORMATION came on;—another surprising work of his providence, as head of his Church, when by means unforeseen, in themselves despicable enough, and yet in their effects certain and irresistible, the power of

Antichrist was broken; and light, and truth, and Christian liberty, appeared once more in the Church of Christ.

Now, it is almost impossible but these considerations must affect us; and if they do, these will be the fruits of our meditations:—

We shall adore the wisdom, and power, and providence, of Him that hath foreseen and disposed of all events, for the advantage of his body the Church. And we shall never take unwarrantable ways to secure an interest, which he is so much concerned for; and which he has so wonderfully preserved ever since his Ascension to this day.

But rather, as the most effectual way to secure his favour and protection, and that he may not remove our candlestick, and take away from us the light of the Gospel, as he has done from many churches already, we shall endeavour to restore true Christian discipline, by which, wickedness, wherever it is met with, may be discountenanced,—the doctrine of the Gospel preserved in its purity and simplicity,—and none admitted to continue members of that body, but such as shall render themselves worthy of having JESUS CHRIST for their head.

As sincere members of this body, we shall often call to mind the relation we have to the Son of God,—the example he gave us,—the rules of holiness and purity he left us,—and the happiness he has promised his faithful servants;—never under-valuing the blessing of being members of a society, to which so many glorious privileges have been granted. Another of which we now come to consider;

*Thirdly*; That Jesus Christ is at God's right hand, as our Great High Priest; representing his own death and merits, and by them making intercession for us at the throne of grace. "Seeing" (saith the Apostle) "we have a great High Priest that is passed into the Heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." Which words have a particular relation to the atonement which was made once every year, for the children of Israel, and for all their sins.—

For, as the High Priest went yearly into the holy place with the blood of the sacrifices, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people; so Christ, having obtained eternal redemption for us, by the sacrifice of himself, once for all, he ascended into Heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us; and as able to save, to the uttermost, all that come unto God by him.

\* Eph. i. 10.

† Heb. iv. 14. ‡ Lev. xvi. 34.



It is the *knowledge* and the *consideration* of this, which recommends the Christian religion to the consciences of its professors; delivering them from the apprehensions of God's displeasure, to which they know they are justly liable, and enabling them to serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness, all the days of their lives.

For whenever the remembrance of *this* is seasonably present with us, it is not the *number of our sins*, nor the *greatness* of them,—it is not the *Majesty of him whom we have offended*, nor our *own inability to satisfy his justice*,—that can drive us to despair, when we call to mind, that *the beloved Son of God is our Advocate, our Priest, and Sacrifice*.

If we look back upon the Heathen World, we shall better see the value of this blessing; we shall see men fondly catching at every thing, to save themselves from perishing; sacrificing their very children, to make their consciences easy under the burthen of their transgressions; but all in vain, while they wanted the testimony of God, *that with such sacrifices he was pleased*.

Now this testimony God has vouchsafed us, that he was *pleased with our sacrifice*;—that our *Redeemer is in Heaven*;—that *God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself*, not imputing unto them their former sins. All this we justly conclude, from *his resurrection from the dead*;—from *his sending down the Holy Ghost*;—and from *the reception which the Gospel has met with*, against the natural inclinations of mankind.

This then is our confidence, the hope and comfort of sinners, that “we have an *advocate with the Father*, who is also *the propitiation for our sins*.” But then this will affect men just as they are disposed to receive the truth: “They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”

Such as stand condemned from the reproaches of their own conscience, and would be glad to be free from the guilt of their offences, and the punishment that is due to them: To such, it will be great pleasure to remember, that their High Priest is at the right hand, and in great authority with God; that by his intercession, their sins may be done away, and their pardon sealed in Heaven before they go hence, and be no more seen.

On the other hand, *they that seldom think of what may come hereafter*; that are eagerly bent upon the pleasures, or riches, or honours of the world, and see no danger in conversing with them; or who, being engaged in sinful courses, will not believe, that they are accountable to the justice of God for the breach of his laws: On such minds as these, the knowledge of a Redeemer, of an High

Priest, of an Advocate in Heaven, will make no impression; they see no advantage in these names, no beauty in Him to whom they belong, that they should desire him.

But is there, therefore, nothing desirable, nothing that may *invite the heart* to meditate with pleasure on what he has done, and is still doing for us? Yes, sure; and we shall have still more reason to confess this, when we have considered, in the last place,

*That Jesus Christ is gone to Heaven, to prepare a place for us.*

The words of Christ himself are these:—“I go to prepare a place for you, that where ‘I am, there ye may be also.’”

Let us take a *distant prospect* of the place, as it is described in other Scriptures;—let us see whether it is worth *setting our hearts upon*?—

A place, where all tears, and the occasions of them, shall be taken away; where no oppressor can enter, no disease afflict the immortal inhabitants, nor danger approach them:—A place of *security*, of *glory*, of *pleasure*, for ever; where the *greatest on earth* will be *highly exalted*, and where the *meanest* may find admittance, if it is not their own fault.

Such is the place our blessed Lord is *preparing for us*; such is the happiness we are invited to *set our hearts upon*; that, when our Lord shall call for us, we may be prepared and pleased to change our abode, having disengaged our affections from the world, and placed them there where we are to live for ever.

In short; the blessedness of the place,—the nature of its inhabitants,—the purity of their manners,—the employment of their time,—all conspire to make us pleased and serious;—pleased with the hopes of being, one day, one of that happy company, and seriously careful to do every thing which becomes such an expectation.

To conclude all that has been said upon this head:—Whether we consider JESUS CHRIST, at the right hand of God, as a *mighty Prince*, governing the world in righteousness; or as the *Head of the Church* dispersed over the earth; or triumphant in Heaven; or as our *great High-Priest*, making intercession for us continually; or, lastly, as our *fore-runner*, preparing a place for us:—Here are subjects worthy our meditations, worthy the making them our greatest treasure;—here is matter of love, of joy, of gratitude, and thanksgiving, for ever.

And now we come to consider,

II. *The motives and consequences of fixing our hearts elsewhere.*

\* John xiv. 2.

That



That we are but too apt to do so, every day's experience convinces even the *best of men*; and yet we find that we do so, at the expence of our peace here, and at the hazard of our souls hereafter. What have we to say for ourselves?

*First*; We are afraid of losing *the pleasures of this life*, by being too intent upon, and solicitous for, the next.—What pleasures?—The pleasure of living without thought, and without fear, even where there is reason to apprehend danger?—The pleasure of appearing what we really are not, contented under bitter remorse, pleased with our condition while we are under great uneasiness and uncertainties;—pretending to satisfy the desires of others, making them depend on us for that happiness which we want ourselves?—Or is it the pleasure of living without law, and without restraint;—of doing whatever is in the power of our hand to do;—of gratifying our appetites to the destruction of our bodies or estates;—or, lastly, is it the pleasure of going out of the world, at all adventures, to a place, which, for ought we know, may be much worse than that we leave?

If these are the *pleasures* which we cannot give up for the *hopes of Heaven*, they are such as we have hardly the countenance to defend; and therefore it will not be worth while to go about to expose them.

*Secondly*; But *we cannot quit the world*, in which we have so many engagements.—Why; who bids us? Are not we sent into the world on purpose to try how we shall behave ourselves in it? Has not the providence of God appointed a great variety of states and conditions of life, that every one may have his proper trial? Are there not people who have *great power and authority*, without using them to evil purposes? *Riches*, without spending them all upon their lusts and vanities? *Learning and great parts*, without being proud or factious?—On the other hand; are there not people who are *very poor*, and yet *very contented*; not attempting to better their condition by unjust ways, but with great patience expecting, that an amendment will be made them in the next world, for what they want in this?

In one word:—We may live in the world without doating on it, without setting up our rest in it; and we may sometimes retire out of it, converse with God, think of what may become of us when we shall be forced to leave it, and timely prepare for so great a change.

*Thirdly*; But *is it not hard to dwell upon thoughts, and to submit to laws, so very contrary to the way of the world?* Why; this is the truth of the case:—Jesus Christ came

from Heaven;—he came to shew us the way thither;—he found the world engaged in customs and manners, very unlike those of the place he designed to bring us to. It was therefore necessary, he should give us such *rules* to walk by, such *examples* to follow, such *doctrines* to believe and depend on, as he knew were proper to fit us for the place, and company, and happiness, he should prepare for his servants and followers.

*These things* he commanded us *seriously to think of*,—to make them the *delight*, as they are the *concern*, of our souls: And it is our *crime*, and not our *apology*, that we find it so hard to disengage our affections from the *ways of the world*, which we have been so long fond of, and which have estranged us from *the Love of God*.

*Fourthly*; But *may we not love the world, and yet be secure of the favour of God?* The Spirit of God tells us expressly, *we cannot*;—that an heart divided betwixt God and the world, can never be a sacrifice acceptable to *Him*, who gives us all the good we enjoy, and promises us more than we can comprehend. And sad experience may convince us, how hazardous and afflicting it is, to attempt to keep a correspondence with two so opposite powers.

The *world* will gain upon our hearts: We shall every day see less danger in conversing with it; we shall learn to admire, to imitate, to defend its pleasures, its vanities, and its vices; and, in time, we shall find satisfaction, and an agreeableness in those very things which we know will be our destruction.

If we retain a sense of God in our minds, it will only serve to afflict us, while we know we do not love him with all our hearts: And though we dare not, for our lives, renounce the hopes of Heaven and Happiness, yet, since we cannot think of them with any assurance and delight, the thoughts of them will only serve to distract and to torment us.

This is the consequence of desiring to *secure the favour of God*, while we are *passionately concerned for the world*; and this is the case of an infinite number of people, either struggling to free themselves from the *bondage of corruption*, without a *sincere and resolute purpose* of doing so, or carried along with the stream of evil customs, forbidden liberties, or destructive vices, till they shall no longer retain God in their knowledge, till God gives them over to a mind void of judgment.

And now, the most useful conclusion to this discourse will be, to lay down the *characters* of a *worldly*, and of a *Christian spirit*, by which every one, for himself, may be able

<sup>b</sup> 1 John ii. 15.



to judge *what spirit he is of*. And this we may certainly do, by the general bent of our hearts and affections; for where the heart delights to dwell, there, no doubt of it, is its treasure, whether here or in Heaven.

Now, for a man not to be able to “*commune with his own heart*,” but with the utmost impatience;—nor to *think of eternity*, but with the fears of a criminal;—to be fond of all opportunities and occasions of diverting the mind from conversing with God;—to be afraid of retirement, as of a plague;—and to run into company, business, or pleasures, only to avoid the sight of one’s self;—to be most concerned to adorn, to gratify, to indulge the body, and its appetites:—These are certain marks and characters of a *worldly spirit*, and of an *unregenerate state*.

And the misfortune is, there are people, who keeping themselves free from open and scandalous crime, for which they cannot be called to an account, apprehend no great danger from all this.

With this spirit they can *pray*, without a sense of their dependance upon God;—they can *read*, without being at all convinced of the truth;—can frequent the publick worship, without any benefit to themselves, or honour to him whom they pretend to serve. With this spirit they can *converse with the world*, without concern and caution;—hear the *name of God blasphemed* without pain;—and see *religion under contempt*, and its laws every where violated, without endeavouring, without desiring, a reformation.—And who, say they, can *judge us*? Would to God we could be persuaded to judge ourselves, “*that we be not judged of the Lord!*”

But the world *will judge us*, whether we will or no. And there are outward actions which effectually discover the true sense and state of the soul, and that judgment which, without a timely repentance, will one day pass upon us.

A man, for instance, who speaks of religion with an air that plainly discovers an aversion for its precepts, and a contempt of its rewards, let him pretend what he will, loves neither God nor religion.

No man, who despises the Priesthood on earth, can with any truth be said to value Jesus Christ, the head of that Holy Order, in Heaven.

We cannot be said to value the happiness which Christ is preparing for his friends and servants, while we have so sensible a relish for the pleasures of this life, as to be entirely satisfied with them; never easy, but when we are seeking, enjoying, or thinking of them.

In short; to gratify the inclinations, whenever they are importunate;—to be fond of such diversions as at best are suspicious, and but too apt to corrupt the manners, and take off the mind from whatever is serious and of moment;—to be ashamed of doing what the Gospel requires, because it is not according to the way of the world;—to be afraid of the censures of men, more than of the judgment of God:—Wherever this is the case, it will be to no purpose to dissemble either the sin, or the danger;—it would be cruelty to suffer such people to hope for mercy, without first giving a new turn to their thoughts, their desires, and their actions.

On the other hand; one *whose treasure is in Heaven* will have his conversation there also; and it will appear that he has so, by the fruits of an holy, regular, and useful life.

For the *Knowledge and Love of God*, where these possess the heart, will easily determine a man how to act in every circumstance.

If he remembers, that he has an *Advocate in Heaven*; this will encourage him to go to the *Throne of Grace*, with a becoming boldness, whether for help or pardon.

But yet he will not dare to do so, while he continues under the dominion of sin; for this would be to affront his *Prince and Saviour*,—to despise his authority,—and to set at nought the terms of mercy which he has offered to all such as repent, and turn to God, and “*bring forth fruits meet for repentance*;” and therefore he calls himself to an account, without scruple, and without reserve.

When he remembers his *Benefactor*, the place and the happiness which he has prepared for his followers, it is natural to be pleased with the thoughts of what he may one day enjoy: But then he considers, that it would be the utmost folly to hope to be a companion of Saints and Angels, without fitting himself for such glorious company.

If business calls him into the world, he keeps his eye, however, upon the *one thing needful*; and remembering, that “*all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do*;” he is *sincere* in all his ways, *just* without compulsion, *charitable* without ostentation, and *devout* without hypocrisy.

If he is to *obey*, he does it *for conscience-sake*; and, if it is his lot to *command*, he always remembers, that *he has a Master in Heaven*.

He considers, that it is not for strangers and pilgrims in the world, to be fond of it to excess; and therefore he finds it necessary to keep his desires within bounds,—to deny



deny himself many liberties, because there may be danger in them, though the world will not think so.

He lays these necessary restraints upon all his *diversions*, that they be innocent, and that they steal not away too much of his heart and time.

In short; his affections being in Heaven, this makes his conversation on earth innocent, agreeable, and useful.

And now, let us call our virtue to the test;—let us see, whether we do indeed value “the things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God?”

It is folly to say we do so, if we never think of them. Is it so with us in any other case? Do people that own they love the world, do *they* think of it but seldom? Do they think of any thing else? Do they want to be persuaded to speak of it, to commend it, to enjoy it?

And let us not judge our condition to be safe, from a few instances of outward devotion, from a few acts of charity, which may be the effects of shame or vanity; or from a reservedness in conversation, which common decency obliges to; for in truth, *the only test of our sincerity and love of God* is this, that we endeavour “that God in all things may be obeyed and glorified.”

The consequence of which will appear in our lives; We shall value things just as they deserve;—such as are uncertain, of no long continuance, which will neither make us wiser, nor better, nor more useful in our generations, we shall value accordingly;—and be most concerned to know, and to remember, and practise, what is necessary to fit us for a blessed eternity.

In short; we shall be very careful to let the thoughts of Heaven, and the business of the world to come, have their share, at least, of our time and employment; and we shall shew *that we love God, by keeping his commandments.*

But, how shall we bring our hearts to this temper? How shall we bring our wills to

submit to this law of life? Why, just as we obtain any other grace or virtue; by *reason, by meditation, and prayer.*

We are sure, *this is not the place we were made for*; and we easily see, that the things we so much admire are but marks of slavery, and sad instances of our being chained down to a world, which can never make us happy; that therefore we ought to disengage our hearts from it as soon as may be.

And then let us remember, that all the little arts of *diverting ourselves*, and stifling that remorse which is the consequence of consenting to known iniquity, will soon be at an end, and we shall, in a little time, be sick of those pleasures, which now we are so fond of.

Then let us turn our eyes upon the place and happiness which our blessed Saviour has purchased and prepared for us:—Let us retire, and consider on what conditions we may be happy for ever.

And if we find that the promise is sure, —the reward worth our utmost endeavours, —the conditions reasonable and necessary;—what can we do less, than to *pray to God to fix these thoughts in our hearts*,—to wean our affections from a world which we are but too apt to be fond of, and which will ruin us if we are so;—and, to bring us to himself, by what ways to him seem most meet?

If we live in the practice of *these duties*, our affections will be loose from the world, our hearts much in Heaven, and we shall be secure of the favour of God, and from fear of evil.

Now, to make us very serious and concerned about these things, let us remember, *That this same Jesus, which was taken up from us into Heaven, shall so come in like manner as He has been seen to go into Heaven, namely, in the glory of his Father, with his holy Angels; when he shall reward every man according to his works.*

Now, unto Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and unto the Lamb, be ascribed blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, for ever and ever. Amen.



## S E R M O N LXXIV.

THE MERCY OF GOD IN SENDING THE HOLY GHOST TO CONVERT THE WORLD, AND TO REMAIN WITH HIS CHURCH FOR EVER.

J O H N xvi. 7.

*I tell you the Truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.*

**T**HAT it would be better, and for their advantage, that Christ should leave his disciples, was a hard lesson, and our Saviour was forced to use an extraordinary way of speaking to satisfy them:—I TELL YOU THE TRUTH.

And will not this for ever silence the corrupt reasonings of men, and oblige them to submit to the wisdom of God in all his dispensations; and look upon that to be the best which he does, how much soever it contradicts *their* hopes or desires?—That it would be better for the world that Christ, who had done so much good in it, should leave it;—that it would be better for his disciples, who had been preserved, and taught, and comforted, by his presence, to have him depart from them.

And yet this was the best for them, and for the world also. For when Jesus Christ had satisfied the justice of God by his death, he (according to his promise) sent down the Holy Ghost to teach and to comfort *them*, to convince and to convert the world.

By which good Spirit the Apostles were enabled to teach mankind the way of happiness, whereby we, amongst many other nations, have been brought out of darkness and error, into the clear light and true knowledge of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ;—and by which good Spirit, all Christians (if it is not their own fault) are enabled to know the will of God, and to do what God requires of them.

By Him they are put in mind of their duty when they forget it;—corrected when they are backward and negligent,—supported under all temptations,—comforted under afflictions,—until they are fit for the kingdom of Heaven.

Now, that we may better understand the mercy of God in sending the Holy Ghost after a very wonderful manner, to convert the world, and ever since to remain with his church, to increase the number of believers,

to guide and to preserve them to eternal happiness: That we may all be truly thankful to Christ for this great blessing, and very careful not to grieve the good Spirit of God, by which we are sanctified; it will be proper to consider these two particulars:—

First, *What we are by Nature without the assistance of the Holy Ghost.*

Secondly, *What we are by Grace*; that is, as we are under the government and blessing of that good Spirit.

I. And first; we may see *what we are by nature*, by considering the condition of mankind before the Gospel was published; as well as by looking upon those parts of the world where it is not yet received.

The Holy Scripture does very significantly call the state of mankind before the preaching of the Gospel, *a state of darkness*: “Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light;” that is, Ye were heretofore Heathens, but now ye are Christians. And it was truly a state of darkness;—they were subject to the prince and powers of darkness;—they were engaged in works of darkness;—they were ignorant of the true God;—they were without hopes and without promises.

And thus it is, at this day, with all those nations who have not yet received the Gospel; they are under such power and dominion of the Devil, as makes all good Christians to pity them. To see creatures like ourselves worship the sun and moon, and cry for help to creatures that cannot hear nor help them;—to see them worship those very evil spirits which delight to afflict mankind,—is what should make us seriously to value the blessing of knowing better things.

But we need not go so far for instances of what we are by nature, void of grace. Let us but seriously think of it, that whatever difference there is amongst men, if one man is in any thing better than another, it is

<sup>c</sup> Ephes. v. 8.

purely



purely owing to the good Spirit of God; for we are all born in sin and prone to it, and though we have reason and understanding, yet we may see into what errors it would lead us, by observing into what errors it leads others. For is there any wickedness that can be named, that men born with reason, but destitute of the grace of God, have not committed?

Our first parents are an instance sufficient to shew us what reason, in its greatest perfection, when left to itself, will end in; namely, in the destruction of those that trust to it. And will any man on earth pretend to govern himself by reason better than they did?

In short; there is nothing so wicked, nothing so base, that one man is guilty of, but another is, by nature, capable of being so. And though this may look strange to one who finds in his breast an abhorrence for some vices, and supposes that he should die rather than be guilty of them; yet he may perhaps change his thoughts, when he considers, that there are few people who, in many instances, do not come to be in love with vices, which once in their lives they had a hearty dislike to. The Holy Scriptures have given us several very noted examples of this. "Am I a dog," saith Haseel to the Prophet, "that ever I should do such vile things?" And yet, for all this abhorrence, he did those very wicked actions. "Though I die with thee," said St. Peter, "yet will I not deny thee in any wise;" and yet, being left to himself, to make good that resolution, you know how it ended.

Now; these things are written for our example, that we may see what poor, weak, vile creatures we are by nature;—that we may learn not to value ourselves, not to trust in our own strength;—and to know, that whenever we do any thing that is good or praise-worthy, *it is God that worketh in us both to will, and to do, of his own good pleasure*,—that we may justly ascribe the whole glory to God, who, having given us the earnest of his Spirit in baptism, continues to guide, and protect, and bless us all our days, at least until we drive that good Spirit from us by our evil deeds.

II. And this brings us to consider *what we are by Grace*; that is, as we are sanctified by the Holy Ghost.

Now that I may do this more to your advantage, I must first in a few words, and in as plain a way as I can, endeavour to make you sensible of the true state and condition of a Christian.

Let us consider then, that we are creatures subject to sin and to misery;—that God has

permitted us to be born in this condition, that we may see the sad effects of forsaking the commands of God;—and that, when we find we are unable to help ourselves, we may be brought to look up to and depend on him for help and happiness, which, at our baptism, without any merit of ours, God hath covenanted to give us.

Now, to prove us, whether we will indeed live in a constant dependance upon God, and at all times seek to him for help, he hath permitted the Devil to tempt us; that is, to endeavour to draw us from our duty; but at the same time we have this faithful promise, that his good Spirit shall ever be with us, to defend, and comfort, and strengthen us, provided we seek to him for help, and do not grieve him by continuing in any known sin.

To encourage us thus to serve God, whatever good thing we do, by *his* assistance, he will graciously reward it, as if it had been done purely by ourselves.

But if we shall neglect or despise God's assistance, and, by depending upon ourselves, yield to temptations, the Spirit of God will forsake us, and we shall become the Devil's servants, and be very miserable both in this life and another.

From which it appears, that this world is not the place we were made for, but that this life is a state of trial and discipline, a state of temptation and danger. And yet we have no reason to complain; for if we depend upon God, he will give us an exceeding great reward, such as we could never deserve; and we are sure not to miscarry but by our own faults.

Nay; I must add, that the condition of every Christian is safer and better than that of our first parents in their state of innocency. They had reason and innocency to support them, and they notwithstanding fell; instead of which, we have an Almighty Hand ever with us to assist and guide us, and a faithful promise of such a reward as by nature we have no right to: And if at any time we fall, we have an Advocate with God, ready to make our peace upon our true repentance.

This is the true state and condition we are in, and you cannot but be convinced that it is a safe one, and much better than we deserve.

Now, as safe a condition as this is, it is plain, that very many, by their own fault, miscarry, and are undone for ever. Therefore, that we may, from the mistakes of others, learn to be more careful of ourselves, let us consider, how it comes to pass that men perish under such safe and powerful means of grace.



And, *first*, very many miscarry by not taking notice of God's Spirit working in their hearts.

The Holy Scriptures give us notice, that of ourselves we are not able to think one good thought, but that "it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do." So that we may be assured, if at any time our consciences are awake,—if we are afraid of God's judgments,—if we are sensible of his mercies,—if we are troubled with the thoughts of having offended him by our sins;—we may be assured, that all this is the work of the Spirit of God, and that to endeavour in such case to quiet our minds, to divert our thoughts by business or pleasures, is truly to resist the Holy Ghost, and to quench the Spirit.

So likewise, if we are under any outward afflictions, as sickness, loss of friends, loss of goods, or the like; we know by the Word of God, that nothing comes by chance, but that all things are ordered by the providence of God for the good of his creatures; and that these are ways by which the Holy Ghost would make us sensible of our errors, wean us from the love of this world, and make us desirous of a better. And therefore it is said, concerning afflictions of this kind, "God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not."

So that to be unconcerned when God afflicts us, is not to perceive the voice of God. And this is one way by which men miscarry.

And, *secondly*, another is, by their not making use of the means which God has afforded them for their salvation.

We can do nothing without God's help; but if we can have his help for asking it as we ought to do, it is then plainly our own fault if we have it not. And that we may have it for asking, our Blessed Saviour has assured us, after a very sensible manner: "If ye, being evil, know how to give good things unto your children, how much more shall your Heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"

Do but consider how ready parents are to give their children what is fit for them, when *they* ask, and you will be satisfied, that it is your own fault, if you have not such a measure of grace and strength as is necessary for your safety.

It is true, "Without faith," that is, without believing the word of God, "it is impossible to please God." And it is as true, that I cannot believe what I please. But if I once know that faith comes by hearing, that is, by attending to the Word

of God read or preached;—if the word of God is read to us every Lord's day, and we regard it not, but endeavour to thrust it away from us, and choak the good seed by minding of other things; why then our destruction is of ourselves. For the Word of God is quick and powerful, able to convert the greatest sinner, who will but seriously attend to it.

But if a man, when he hears what God, in that Holy Word, has threatened to wilful sinners,—that there is a place "where the worm dieth not, and where the fire is not quenched;"—that this will most certainly be the portion of all them that die in their sins unrepented of;—that all such as neglect and despise the means of grace and salvation, shall be tormented for ever and ever. If people, when they hear this, are not at all concerned, but go on without laying it to heart; and strive to divert these thoughts and fears, and run out of the way of hearing the truth of them made out to their consciences;—why, it is manifest, they *will not* be saved, though the Holy Ghost is striving with them to bring them to Heaven.

And when they hear what the Spirit of God has made known to us concerning the joys of Heaven,—that it is impossible for the tongue of man to describe, or for the heart of man to conceive, what great blessings the Lord hath laid up for them that love him;—that God for the sake of Jesus Christ has published a full and free pardon for all sinners, who with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him;—that in order to our being happy, he will expect no more from us than what he will enable us to perform. If people, when they hear these promises, will not mind them, but are resolved to take their share of pleasures here, whatever becomes of those that God has promised hereafter;—all that must be said is, that they will be for ever undone,—that the Holy Ghost would save them, by setting these promises before them to make them desirous of Heaven, but they will not be persuaded.

And thus many miscarry for want of faith, notwithstanding the Holy Spirit is amongst us, striving to bring us all to that knowledge of God, and to that obedience which would save our souls.

*Thirdly*; But it is not only for want of hearing the Word of God that men miscarry; even they that read and think of these things may be lost, if they are not careful to maintain good works. It is a Gospel direction,\* "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit;" that is, If we believe and live under the Gospel, let us do

\* Phil. ii. 13. \* Job xxxiii. 14. † Luke xi. 13.

\* Gal. v. 25.



what the Gospel commands us. If we are dedicated to the Spirit of God, and hope for his help and assistance, let us live like people that do so.

Now if, instead of doing this, we grieve the Holy Spirit, by going against our consciences,—by refusing to obey the precepts of Christ, when we know them;—by yielding to the temptations of the devil, without asking God's help, without which we know we cannot resist that powerful spirit;—if we continue to do so, though the Spirit of God shews us the great danger we are in, then we grieve the Holy Ghost, by which we were sanctified, and he will leave us to ourselves, and we shall certainly be ruined.

*Lastly*, (notwithstanding the assistance of God's Holy Spirit) There are many, who have taken up good resolutions of serving God, and yet miscarry for want of continuing in them unto their lives end:—for either they despair of succeeding, through a sense of their own weakness,—or they neglect to make use of and to improve the means of grace, which for the present God has given them;—either of which will most certainly be their ruin.

But if, instead of despairing of success, people would consider, that greater is he that is in us, (that is, the Holy Ghost) than he that is in the world, (that is, the Devil.) If people would but call to mind the power of the Holy Ghost, as it is delivered to us in the Holy Scriptures, by whom ignorant men became of a sudden teachers of others;—the Holy Ghost enabling them to speak unknown languages, to work miracles, to confirm their doctrines, and to convince the world that they were not possessed with a spirit of error and delusion.

If men would observe what a change is made upon those who from great sinners have become true penitents; that from having been strongly inclined to sin, they are become as much inclined to holiness,—to have quite different thoughts of their former way of living,—not now to look upon sin as a harmless, indifferent thing, but, as indeed it is, to be avoided rather than death itself. In a word, that their whole man has been changed or made new, in so much as the Scriptures call this a *new birth*, and being *born again*.

Whoever thinks seriously of these things will conclude, that there is nothing impossible with God,—and that though our sins are so many that we cannot recount them,—though we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves;—yet if we earnestly seek to God for help, and lay hold of the means offered to us, it is certain we shall be safe, provided we use that measure of grace which

God gives us;—for this is a rule given us by our Blessed Saviour: “To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundantly; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have.” To him that hath, (that is, that hath made use of the grace which God hath given him) to him God will give more grace: But he that neglects the means of grace, from him shall be taken away even what before he had given him.

People do not consider how dangerous a thing it is to put by good thoughts,—to neglect the good advice of their friends,—to lose opportunities of knowing their duty. If they would but consider, that all these are means of grace,—that they are indeed the work of the Holy Ghost,—they would not so easily despise them, but would really be afraid of rejecting the least degrees of grace afforded them for their conversion and salvation.

The Pharisees<sup>a</sup> rejected the counsel of God,—his gracious design towards them;—they rejected the counsel of God in refusing the baptism of John; and look what followed their despising these lesser favours: They afterwards rejected the Son of God himself, and his doctrine, though approved and confirmed by miracles.

The same Spirit, which has declared, that he will not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax,—that he will encourage the very beginnings of piety,—the same Spirit has also said these terrible words:<sup>i</sup> “Because I called, and ye refused; “I stretched out my hand, and no man regarded; I will also laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.”—So dangerous a thing it is to resist or to neglect the Spirit of God, and the day of grace!

Let us lay all this together, and to heart too.—

We are by nature born in sin, in which we should live and die, without God's help and mercy. We are by baptism made the children of grace and favour: To all that are so, the Holy Spirit is given,—to enlighten their minds with saving truth,—to lead them in the ways of virtue and holiness,—to protect them against their spiritual enemies,—to comfort them under all adversities,—and to bring them safe to Heaven.

In order to these great ends, the Holy Ghost has given them a rule to walk by, namely, THE HOLY SCRIPTURES,—THE WORD OF GOD. And that they may trust to that rule, he has confirmed it by many great miracles.

<sup>a</sup> Luke vii. 30. <sup>i</sup> Prov. i. 24.



He has also appointed a certain Order of Men, who, under the severest penalties, are faithfully to preach this Word unto his people, and he has promised to bless their labours. To encourage men to give ear unto them, they are by the Holy Ghost empowered to promise all such as shall obey that Word, the blessings of this life and of that which is to come.

And, that men may be afraid to neglect these gracious offers, they are directed to set before the people the terrible danger of doing so, and that it is a dreadful thing for a sinner to fall into the hands of the Living God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

All such as lay these things to heart, and are desirous of serving God, and of saving their souls, the Holy Ghost is ever ready to assist them,—By putting into their minds good desires,—by enabling them to do what he has made them willing to do,—by giving them opportunities of learning and performing their duty,—by succouring them when they are tempted to sin,—and by encouraging and cheering their hearts, when they have overcome temptations,—from time to time increasing his favours as they make good use of them, until they come to Heaven, when all danger shall be over.

On the other hand; all such as have been dedicated to God in baptism, and, when they come to years of discretion, do not seriously think of what it is to be a Christian; or do not embrace and close with the means of grace afforded them; such persons have no possible way of escaping the dangers of a sinful world, the temptations of a powerful evil spirit, or the miseries of a future life.

Therefore, it behoves every man who hopes to be saved, (and who is there that does not?) it concerns every man to consider, what it is he is a doing, when he neglects or resists the Holy Ghost calling him to repentance and newness of life: That he is taking himself from under God's protection, and putting himself into the service of the Devil;—that he cannot go back when he pleases into the service of God, no more than he can go to Heaven without the leave of God;—that the wisest man cannot tell where he shall stop, what he shall do, when once he ventures to leave the ways of religion, and the means of grace afforded him in the Church of God.

And let no man say that he wants grace and strength to do what God expects from him; for God expects no more than an honest use of that measure of grace which he has already bestowed upon a man.

It is not expected from one newly converted, that he should be perfect,—that he

should never fall into sinful courses;—but this is expected from him, that he should avoid all occasions (as much as possible) and temptations to sin,—that he should earnestly pray for grace and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost,—that whenever he falls he should speedily return to God by repentance, and make new resolutions of obedience.—And whoever does this in good earnest, is in the way of salvation, and under the conduct of the Spirit of God.

From whence we may conclude, (and I pray God all that are concerned may take notice, and lay it to heart) that every person who often falls into the same sins, and does not strive against them,—avoid temptation,—pray to God for help;—that such persons may justly apprehend that they are not in the way of salvation.

To conclude the whole:—Here is all the encouragement our hearts can desire to turn to God. He will forgive us what is past;—he will enable us for the time to come;—he will help us when we fall;—and he will make us happy when we die. Why then should we put off our repentance? Is it because we purpose never to become new men? O, no; the hardiest sinner amongst us dare not resolve never to amend.

But then let us remember, that it is not when we please, but when the Holy Ghost pleases, that we shall repent and turn to God; and if the Holy Ghost stirs in us a desire of doing so, and we neglect that desire or inclination, if we do this often, we have much reason to fear he will leave us to ourselves, and then it will be impossible for us ever to repent.

Therefore, if there be any of you, who are sensible that you have hitherto lived a careless, unchristian life;—if you are afraid of what will follow, and do wish that you had taken up sooner;—if you are convinced that the judgments of God against sinners are terrible and true, and do seriously wish that you were in a safer condition;—then consider, that these being thoughts tending towards repentance, are from the good Spirit of God;—that none of his motions are in vain, but when people wilfully oppose them, or refuse to hear the voice of God.

What then have you to do? God himself directs you; “To-day, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;” resolve, that by the help of God, you will from this moment do what you can to save your soul;—that you will pray to God to direct, to assist, and to bless your endeavours, and do what you resolve; and be assured the Holy Ghost will be with you, to guide, to help, and to comfort you.

Whoever



Whoever amongst us has hopes towards God, and believes himself in the way of life, ought to consider, that when the Scripture speaks of grieving the Holy Spirit, it does intimate to us, that it is possible for us to do such things as may force him from us.

Our duty then is, to be careful of our ways; and, as we hope for salvation, not to dare to continue in the practice of any known vice; but if we are overtaken, to ask ourselves this question,—Is this sin I have been guilty of consistent with my hopes of mercy at the great day? It is not; and therefore I must part with it, or part with my hopes of Heaven.

And be assured, he that dares not thus reason with his heart is not yet well in love with a Christian life, but is in danger of being disappointed of his hopes of Heaven.

From what has been said, you see what God has done for us, before we were able to do any thing for ourselves.

He has received us into Covenant,—given us his Holy Word and Sacraments,—made us many great and precious promises,—and set before us the dreadful consequence of neglecting them.

You see likewise, that *now* something is to be done by us, that we may secure the favour and assistance of this Holy Spirit.

We must keep ourselves pure and undefiled members of Christ's Church;—

We must not drive him from us, by any wicked course of sinning; and we must omit no opportunities of growing in grace, which God has appointed and shall afford us:—

We must read or hear his Holy Word;—

We must take care to keep holy such days as are set apart for his service;—

We must go constantly to his house, and constantly acknowledge our dependance upon him, by praying to God for what we want, and by giving him thanks for what we receive;—

And we must be sure to receive the Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which is the strength and refreshment of our souls, and is therefore in an especial way called *a means of grace*.

Now, if we do these things as we ought, with an honest heart, these will be the effects:—

*First*; We shall be very humble, knowing that we have nothing of our own to boast of: for if I differ from another, it is the Holy Ghost that has made the difference, we being all equally born in sin, and all equally liable to be over-run with it.

*Secondly*; We shall be very careful of our ways, remembering, that we are under the direction and government of an Holy Spirit, who will be grieved to see us thoughtless and negligent when our immortal souls lie at stake.

*Lastly*; We shall be very thankful that God is pleased to accept and save us upon any terms.—But that his good Spirit will ever be present with us, to keep us in the way we should go,—to pull us back when we go wrong,—to defend us against our powerful enemies,—to support, to comfort, and at all times to succour us:—This ought to create in us such a sense of gratitude as we are not able to express, but by an entire obedience to his commands.

And may that blessed Spirit, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, rest upon us and dwell with us for ever;—preserving us in the unity of the church;—continuing to us the means of grace;—removing far from us all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of God's word;—that we may, with patience and comfort, run the race that is set before us; stedfastly believing, that all things shall work together for good to those that fear God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.



## S E R M O N LXXV.

THE LORD'S SUPPER THE MEDICINE OF THE SOUL.

M A R K vi. 56.

*As many as touched him were made whole.*

**T**H E whole verse is as followeth :  
 “ Whithersoever Jesus entered, into  
 “ villages, or cities, or country, they laid  
 “ the sick in the streets, and besought him  
 “ that they might touch, if it were but  
 “ the border of his garment ; AND AS  
 “ MANY AS TOUCHED HIM WERE MADE  
 “ WHOLE.”

What a blessed opportunity had these people of being healed of all their diseases ! How happy did they think themselves in having Jesus Christ present amongst them ! How good and kind was he, to go from one place to another, that every body who had a desire to be healed, and who had faith in his power, *might be made whole !*

We cannot but esteem this a mighty blessing, and wish it were our own case. Why now, my Christian brethren, it is our own case, and to much greater purposes. And we should certainly be convinced of it, if we were but as sensible of our spiritual disorders, as these people were of the diseases of their bodies ; and we should, with as much zeal and faith in his power and readiness to help us, we should apply to him now he is in Heaven, as earnestly as these people did when he was on earth and amongst them.

All that we want is, *to feel our disorders*, and to see the danger we are in without his help ; for then we should, with thankful hearts, accept of the sovereign medicine which he has prescribed for the cure of all our maladies.

Well then, how may we become sensible of our disorders and danger ?—Let every one, who desires to know this, look into his own heart, and ask himself some such questions as these :—Do I love with all my heart the God who made me, who preserves and gives me all that I want, or enjoy, or hope for ?—Do I fear to offend him, who, for my own good, has given me rules to live by, and has assured me, that if I do not observe those rules, I shall lose his favour, and deprive myself of greater happiness than all this world can give me ?

The true answer *must* be this :—I find myself prone to evil continually ;—of myself I am not able to resist the temptations to sin that I meet with ;—I do many things which my own conscience tells me *I ought not to do*, and I omit very many duties which I owe to God my Maker, to my neighbour, and to myself ;—I cannot but be sensible that I do not love God as I ought to do ;—I have not had that regard to his commands, that so great a Majesty demands of me ;—I have received infinite mercies and favours from his goodness, and have never thanked him for them ;—I have, times without number, broken his commands, without fearing what must follow ;—I have little minded what his own Son has made known to us, —that a day is coming when God will judge the world in righteousness, according to our behaviour in this life ; and that they that have done good shall go into life and happiness everlasting, and they that have done evil, and have not timely repented, shall go into everlasting fire.

This I have heard a thousand times, without being awakened, or bettered by it ; I cannot but see that every day brings me nearer death ; that death is the end of my trial in this life, and that after that there is no repentance.

Jesus Christ in his Holy Gospel assures us, that, the moment we die, our souls are carried to places of happiness or misery, according as our lives have been spent here, there to remain till the judgment of the great day.

Now, who is there that hears and understands this, who does not know that every syllable of this is true ? For these are not the sayings of men, but THE WORDS OF GOD, the God of Truth, who cannot deceive his creatures, but would have all men to repent, and to come to the knowledge of the truth, and of their own interest.

And can any man hear these truths, and apply them to himself, without seeing that this is his own case,—without seeing the danger he is in without some help besides his



his own,—and without laying hold of that help that is offered him by a merciful Saviour and Physician of our souls?

Do but look back to the Text, and the History set before you for your consideration and pattern. All that found themselves sick and in danger, made no delay, lest they should lose so good an opportunity of being healed of their infirmities. Wherever Jesus Christ came, they saw his power and his mercy to help poor miserable people, and they besought him to heal them;—and he did so most willingly.

They saw plainly, that without his help they must suffer or die; and they besought him,—they begged of him,—to heal them of their diseases:—And as many as did so, were made whole.

Now, my Christian brethren, what have I set this history before you for, but to persuade you to follow the example of these diseased people? Not one soul of us will dare to say, *Nothing ails me,—I am in no danger.* “If we say that we have no sin,” we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not “in us,” saith St. John; and so saith every man’s own conscience, who will but look inwards.

And what saith the Spirit of Truth in the Gospel?—*No wicked person can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,*—can inherit eternal life,—but shall be sent into outer darkness, “where there shall be weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.”

Now—Can any sinner, can any man who knows any thing of himself, be easy under the belief and thoughts of this, until he knows whether there be any help for him or not?

Here therefore is seen the blessing of Christianity, which offers, which has provided, a remedy for all our disorders, and for all our fears. “The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin,” saith the Holy Spirit by St. John; and our Lord Christ himself says, “Verily, all sins shall be forgiven unto men;” that is, unto those who are weary and heavy laden with the burthen of their sins;—who confess and forsake their sins, and, through faith in his blood, beseech him to help, and to heal them; and this with that sincere desire and earnestness, that these sick people desired to touch, if it were but the border of his garment, and were thereby made whole.

This will lead us to consider, how Jesus Christ has appointed us to apply to him for his help, and the cure of our disorders.

For though he is gone into Heaven, yet he is still ready and has promised to heal all the diseases of our souls, when we apply to

him, out of a true sense of our sad condition without his help and mercy.

Jesus Christ, while he was on earth, had told his disciples and followers,\* That he was “the bread of life,” *the life-giving-bread*, “which came down from Heaven,” “which if any man should eat, he should live for ever.”—That “this bread is his flesh, which he would give for the life of the world.”—He adds, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

These were then indeed strange sayings to his followers. Some said, *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?* Others were offended, and departed from him. But when his time came, that he was to die, and to become a sacrifice for the sins of the world, he explained himself to his Apostles, when he appointed that Ordinance or Sacrament, which is called THE LORD’S SUPPER. For then he took bread, and having blessed it, he gave it to his Disciples, and said, “This is my body, which is given for you.” And of the wine he said, “This is my blood, which is shed for you, and for many:—EAT THE ONE, AND DRINK THE OTHER, IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.”

Then they understood, that when before he had spoken of eating his flesh and drinking his blood, as necessary to eternal life, he did not mean it in such a manner as they then understood it, but in a spiritual manner, as he now explained it; namely, that Christ is our life,—the food of our souls,—in this Sacrament. As common bread is the food of our bodies, so this is the support of our spiritual life.

He therefore ordained this Sacrament to be for ever observed by all Christians, not only as a testimony of his great love, in laying down his life for his poor creatures; but as a way by which he would communicate to them all the blessings he had by his death obtained for them;—*the pardon of their sins in this world, and eternal life after death.*

Happy therefore will all those be, who, after the example of these sick and diseased people, being sensible of their infirmities and danger, do go to him for help, and take all opportunities of going by faith to the Physician of their souls; he having blessed this very ordinance, for our help and comfort, with a power of healing all our spiritual diseases.

We see, that the very border of his garment, by his blessing, had the virtue to heal

\* John vi. 51, &c.



all those, that through faith in him touched it, of all their bodily infirmities. And shall we doubt the blessed effects of this holy ordinance to every worthy communicant, to procure for him the favour of God,—the pardon of his sins,—the assistance of God's Holy Spirit,—and *eternal life and happiness* after death?

God forbid we should any of us doubt this! God can affix and join his blessings and helps to whatever he pleaseth. By his appointment, the common waters of Jordan healed Naaman the Syrian. By his appointment, a brazen serpent healed all those that were bitten, only by looking upon it with faith in God's commandment. By the very shadow of St. Peter, many, we are assured, were healed of their diseases. And here, as many as touched our Saviour's garment were made whole.

And it is thus that the two Sacraments become means of salvation to all such as with faith receive them. The *Water* in BAPTISM, with the blessing and grace of God, has power in it to cleanse us from our sins. And the *Bread* in the LORD'S SUPPER, being set apart and blessed, becomes the bread that nourisheth to eternal life.

Why then does any Christian neglect this sovereign medicine? It is every where to be met with, as Jesus Christ himself was when he was on earth. Wherever Christians live, whether in *villages*, or *cities*, or *towns*, or *country*, they may have this blessed cure of their disorders, if it is not their own fault.

Our Lord himself gives us the true reason why people are not sensible of *this* mercy which is offered them: *They that be whole, that do not feel their disorders, and danger, will not be persuaded that they need a physician, but they that are sick. These, and these only, will be glad of, and look out for help.*

For my own part, I am not ashamed to confess, that were it not for the blood of Christ, offered us in this Holy Ordinance,—were it not through faith in his blood,—I should never dare to apply to the great God for the pardon of my sins,—for the assistance of his grace to keep me from ruining myself for ever. My own *reason*, my own *power*, would no more help me, or keep me from ruining myself, than these would keep a new-born child from perishing, if it were left to itself.

And this I am sure is the case of every man living, of every soul that hears me. We have every one of us the seed of every evil, of every sin, we ever heard of, lodged in our corrupt nature, ready to spring out upon every suitable temptation, if not hindered by the grace or providence of God.

When we hear that such a man has robbed or murdered his neighbour, we wonder at it. Why; not one of us but would have done the same, had we been left wholly to ourselves and to the temptation of the devil, and had the same occasion offered us, and God had not interposed his grace or his providence to hinder us.

We easily see, and are very ready to censure, other people's faults. Such a man, we cry, is *covetous*;—such a man is *unjust*;—such a man is *litigious*;—such a man is a *drunkard*;—such a man is an *adulterer*;—such a man is a *common swearer*;—though all these must know that God has forbidden every one of these sins, upon pain of damnation.

You do not consider why these people have fallen into these damnable sins, and why you yourself have not perhaps done so;—but it is fit you should know why you have not; for, be assured of it, let a man be never so *learned*, never so *wise* in his own opinion, never so *cautious*, never so *resolved* against any or all of these sins; yet if he shall provoke God to leave him to himself,—if he shall despise those means which God has appointed to keep us under his especial favour and protection,—there is not one of these sins but he is liable to fall into. And this is the reason why the Spirit of God has given us all, even the best of us, this caution:—"Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

Will any one of us, after this, if this be true, (*as we are sure it is*) will any man say,—I hope I am in no such great danger,—I have no such ailments to be cured of,—I hope I shall be governed by reason,—my own sense of what is good and evil will keep me from such unworthy, from such destructive and shameful vices. *God help him that thinks so!* Indeed, God *must* help you, or your danger is greater, your maladies and disorders are more deadly, than you are aware of.

And were it not for the wonderful love of our blessed Redeemer, in laying down his life as a sacrifice for our sins, and restoring us to the favour of an offended God;—if he had not appointed these means of grace, by which we can plead before God, that his *own Son* has redeemed us from the power of the devil, if it be not our own fault;—if *He* had not obtained for us the assistance of an all-powerful Spirit, to direct and assist us,—*not one soul of us would be saved.*

And now, if after what has been said, and I hope believed,—(for we dare not say any thing but what Christ has commanded us to say and speak)—if, after what you have heard, you are not sensible that your disorders



disorders are *many* and *great*, and of very dangerous consequences if not cured,—there is no help for it, *you must perish*.

This is not what our merciful God and Saviour designed, when he appointed this Holy Sacrament to be observed by all that hope for salvation through his merits. He laid down his life, to convince all mankind that their souls were in danger without his grace and help. He appointed this service, that they might not forget their danger; and that they might have a cure for their diseases, and their fears. Whoever will not accept of this remedy, there is no hopes left for him:—This being the only remedy for our sins, which are the diseases of our souls;—the only medicine to obtain our pardon and the grace of God,—to mend the corruption of our nature,—to increase and to confirm our faith, without which it will be impossible to please God, or to be made whole.

In short; this is the only medicine to supply the graces we want,—the bread by which the life and health of our souls is to be preserved. It is as much the support of our souls, as common bread is the food and support of our bodies.

These, and many more, are the blessings which every Christian may expect, who goes worthily to the Lord's Table.

But who, some will say, can be sure that he shall be a worthy communicant?—Let a man sincerely purpose and strive to amend what he knows to be amiss in himself;—let him sincerely purpose and strive to lead a Christian life for the time to come;—let him firmly believe, that, for the sake of what Jesus Christ hath done and suffered for us, *we have peace with God* upon our repentance;—let him, with a thankful heart, remember the great goodness of God in giving his only Son for his sinful and otherwise lost creatures;—and let him remember the sufferings of Christ, in order to redeem mankind from the slavery of sin and Satan;—and lastly, let him be as ready to forgive others as God has been to forgive him, and as he hopes for that mercy from God:—Every such person may humbly hope to be a meet partaker of these holy mysteries, and may return home healed of all his maladies.

In short; let me observe to you, that Jesus Christ, *the great Physician*, comes to our doors, as he did to these people.

All they that were distressed, and wanted his help, most readily and thankfully applied to him. There was no need to exhort and press them to go to him for a cure. They were convinced, that there was an healing power in him to cure them. Their faith in him cured them of all their diseases:—And the same faith in his power, and the same sense of our disorders, and earnest desire to be relieved, will as certainly obtain the help we wish for, *the cure of all our disorders*.

And may the Lord pity and awaken all such, if there be any such, as are so senseless, and blind, as not to see and feel, that they want his help every day of their lives! When once they are sensible of this, they will not need to be told how often they should go to him for relief. The oftener they go, the better it will be for them, if they go with a sincere desire to be made better.

And be assured of it, Christians, it is with this spiritual food, as it is with the food of our bodies:—A man may fast so long as quite to lose his appetite, and thereby endanger his life;—even so, by abstaining from the Lord's Supper, he may forget the wants he labours under,—he may forget the want and blessing of a Redeemer,—of the Physician of his soul,—till he is past cure without a miracle, which he will have no reason to expect.

And now, may all we, who, through the grace of God, desire and purpose to partake of *this Blessed Medicine of our Souls*, be ever prepared to *receive it worthily*, whenever it is offered to us,—by resolving, *through God's help and grace*, never to live in any *known sin*,—never to act against our conscience,—never to neglect the known duties of our calling,—but to live in the fear of God, and to pray daily for his pardon and grace to do our duty, and that he may increase and confirm our faith, for his mercy's sake in Jesus Christ, our only Physician and Redeemer.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and thanksgiving, now and for ever. Amen.



## S E R M O N LXXVI.

## THE LORD'S SUPPER PRACTICALLY EXPLAINED.

Doce me, Domine Jesu, sacrum hoc institutum tali sacro modo tractare, et conatus meos gratia tua adeo secunda, ut indignus usus corporis et sanguinis tui judicium, meum aut eorum qui me audient, nunquam aggravet; sed sacrificii tui memores semper digni fieremus participes. Amen.

LUKE xxii. 19.

The Words of Jesus Christ when he ordained the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper:  
*This do in remembrance of me.\**

**S**T. PAUL concludes his first epistle to the Corinthians with these remarkable words:—IF ANY MAN LOVE NOT THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, LET HIM BE ANATHEMA MARANATHA.

Now, if the generality of Christians can hear these words without trembling, it must be, either because they do not understand, or they do not consider them. For the meaning and the direction is *this*:—If any Christian amongst you shews by his life and behaviour, THAT HE DOES NOT LOVE THE LORD JESUS, let such a man be separated from your communion, as being under the displeasure of Almighty God.

I dare say, that few Christians, when they hear these words, do think themselves at all concerned in them. We are all but too apt to conclude the best for ourselves, and to think it impossible not to love Jesus Christ, by whose merits and mediation we hope to be saved.

But let us not deceive ourselves. Let us rather, every man, ask himself—How is it that I behave myself to my benefactors, and to those whom I do really love? If any man has done me a very great service,—if a man has promised me any great favour,—I love to speak of him, and of the kindness he has done, or promised me;—I often think of him, and with a thankful mind,—and I fully resolve never to do any thing which may disoblige him.

Is it thus we love the Lord Jesus Christ? Would to God we could all truly say so. However, let us consider what he has done for us, and see how it will affect our hearts.

When the whole race of mankind was under the displeasure of Almighty God,—had forfeited all pretence to immortal happiness,—and had become liable to eternal

death,—Jesus Christ undertook to obtain our pardon, and to restore us to the favour of God.

But the sin had spread so far and wide, that this could not be done without a suitable satisfaction to the justice of God. God had declared, that the disobedience of Adam should be punished with death. His *truth* was at stake, and the offender, and all his posterity, were under his displeasure.

Jesus Christ therefore, moved with compassion for so great a calamity, left the glories of Heaven, and took upon him *our nature*, that, *as man*, he might suffer what our sins had deserved, and that, *as the Son of God*, the satisfaction might be sufficient for the sins of the whole world. In short, he laid down his life for us; and by that most worthy sacrifice, he not only made our peace with God, and delivered us from eternal death; but obtained of God his Father an assurance of eternal life and happiness for all such as would become his faithful servants.

And that such might be distinguished from all others, he appointed an Holy Ordinance, to preserve the memory of these mighty blessings till his coming again; requiring all his faithful followers,—all who expect any benefit by his death,—to commemorate the same after the manner he ordained the night before he suffered.

Let us ask our own hearts,—Does this mercy deserve to be remembered by us?—Or will any Christian say, THAT HE LOVES THE LORD JESUS CHRIST, *who will lightly turn his back upon that holy ordinance*, which Christ himself has appointed, as the most acceptable way of shewing our love to him, and our resolution to continue his faithful servants, for his mercies bestowed upon us.

\* See Deut. xvi. 12. John vi. 26, 51, 53, 55. 1 Cor. x. 16. 1 John i. 7. ii. 28.



And indeed it was for this reason that Jesus Christ ordained this Holy Sacrament, that Christians, being often called upon, and obliged to remember the love of their dying Saviour,—his bitter passion,—the occasion of his death,—the misery they have escaped,—and the happiness he has purchased for them,—might love him with all their heart and soul;—and that doing this as often as ever they should have an opportunity, their love might increase unto their lives end.

May not one therefore conclude, without any great uncharitableness, that such as do lightly turn their backs upon this ordinance, DO NOT INDEED LOVE THE LORD JESUS, and that, according to St. Paul's direction, they ought to be ANATHEMA, that is, separated from the communion of the faithful.

And though this would be called great severity at this time, yet this was the practice of the primitive church, and it was agreeable to the *Law of the Passover*, the great figure of Christ's death, and by God's express command;<sup>1</sup> that is, that whoever did neglect to observe the Passover, in remembrance of their deliverance out of Egypt, THAT SOUL SHOULD BE CUT OFF from among the people of Israel.

And verily, a Christian, who understands and considers the importance of this Ordinance, and is not hindered by some very evil habit, or by having fallen into some scandalous sin, will no more turn his back upon the Lord's Table, than he will dare to deny the God that made him, or the Saviour who redeemed him.

Here are so many reasons to shew the importance, the blessing, and the necessity of observing this Ordinance, that it will be needless to urge any more to such as have any true concern for their salvation.

This, therefore, being a duty and ordinance, which every Christian is obliged to as he hopes for salvation,—to shew his love of Christ, by commemorating his death after the manner he has appointed,—the duty must of necessity be such as every Christian, even the most unlearned, is capable of understanding, and performing worthily.

And indeed so it is. For as the most unlearned Israelite under the Law, when he was commanded to bring his sacrifice to the altar, to lay his hand upon the head of the beast, confessing his sins over him;<sup>m</sup>—As he did very easily understand, that this was to put him in mind, that death was the punishment due to sin,—that he himself deserved the death that that creature was going to suffer,—that it was great mercy in God that he would accept such a sacrifice for his sin,

which yet he had good hopes he would do, since he himself had ordained it:—As he would very easily perceive, that all this was designed, as a very powerful motive, to humble him before God;—to give him an abhorrence of sin, which could not be forgiven without the loss of the life of an innocent creature;—and lastly, that it was intended to lead him to the love of God, who would be reconciled to him upon such gracious terms:—I say, the most ignorant Israelite could understand this end of sacrifices, and perform the duty required of him, as well as the most learned master in Israel.

Even so every Christian, even the most unlearned, is capable of understanding (if it be not plainly his own fault) and of performing, all the duties of a worthy communicant.

For when he is informed, that *this* is the true Christian sacrifice,—the only means of rendering our persons and all our prayers acceptable to God,—of obtaining the pardon of our sins, the assistance of God's grace, and everlasting happiness after death:—When he sees that done before his eyes that Jesus Christ himself did; who the same night in which he was betrayed, having devoted himself an offering and a sacrifice to God for the sins of the whole world, did institute this Holy Sacrament, by taking Bread and Wine, and blessing them, and making them, by that blessing, the true representatives of his Body and Blood, in virtue and power, as well as in name:—

When he is made sensible, that this service was ordained by Christ himself, not only as a testimony of his great love for his poor creatures, but as a means whereby he would communicate all the benefits of that death which he was then going to suffer; and by which he would apply the merits of his death to all people and ages of the world:—

Lastly; when he is assured, even from Christ himself,<sup>n</sup> that whoso eateth and drinketh *this* his flesh and blood after this holy manner, dwelleth in Christ and Christ in him; that such a one has a right to eternal life, and that God will raise him up at the last day:—

Let a man, I say, be never so unlearned, yet he will easily understand,—That he is not to look upon, and receive this Bread and Wine as common food, but as holy representatives of Christ's Body and Blood, made such by an especial blessing of God;—That he is to receive it in remembrance of the death of Christ, and to believe assuredly, that the blessing of God will attend his doing so; for it being God's own Ordinance,

<sup>1</sup> Numb. ix. 13. <sup>m</sup> Lev. i. 4.

<sup>n</sup> John vi. 26.



he cannot but bless *it*, and him who observes it.

And when he is informed, that the Lord Jesus commanded this service to be observed until his coming again, (that is, to judge the world) he will easily conclude, that he ought to prepare himself against that day, by this Holy Ordinance, that he may meet his Lord and Judge as a friend, at whose table he has been so often received and entertained.

A Christian, I say again, let him be never so unlearned, will easily see, that this Holy Sacrament is most proper to prepare him for that great day, and the account he is then to give;—that it is designed to humble him, —to bring him to repentance,—to make him fearful of offending God,—and to make him very thankful for all his mercies.

It will put him often in mind of the sad effects of the Fall of Man, and of the sin occasioned thereby; since no less a sacrifice than the death of Christ would satisfy the justice of God.

He will easily see what he must expect, if he lives and dies in sin unrepented of, even the severest punishment.

He will easily perceive, that these are blessed opportunities, and never to be lost, of renewing his baptismal covenant, which he knows he has broken, and of making his peace with God.

For he cannot but be convinced, that it must be one of the most prevailing arguments with the Divine Majesty, to represent unto him the death of his Son, who died to redeem us, and to restore us to his favour, beseeching him to remember his Son's death in Heaven, for our good, as we do on earth in obedience to his command.

And lastly, a Christian, let him be never so unlearned, must know, and be convinced, that the oftener he presents himself before God, to plead his Son's death, in this holy manner, the more pleasing it will be to God, the more graces he will receive from him, the stronger will be his faith, the surer his hopes, and the firmer his pardon.

He will also very easily see, *what duties are required to make him a worthy receiver of this Sacrament.*

He will understand, for instance, that so solemn a service, and a service upon which his salvation depends, cannot be well performed without some thoughts and consideration.

And a very little consideration will convince him, that he must confess and forsake those sins, which cost Jesus Christ his life, to prevail with God to pardon them;—that

he is to go to the Sacrament with a full purpose of leading a Christian life;—that if he does so, he may depend upon God's mercy through Jesus Christ;—that the remembrance of Christ's death ought to be very dear to him;—and that he is bound to forgive, and to love, and to do good to others, since God is so good and so kind to him.

Every Christian must see, and acknowledge, the necessity of these qualifications; and that whoever goes presumptuously to the Lord's Table without them, will receive a *curse*, instead of a  *blessing*.

I say, *presumptuously*; that is, without *thought*, without *concern*, and without doing what he is able, to become a *worthy communicant*.

For this is our great comfort, that God expects no more of any man, but that he make an honest use of that measure of grace and light which he has given him.

If a man does so, though he may have his scruples, and his fears, yet he cannot be in danger, no more than a dutiful child can be in danger from a father who sees him doing his best to please him.

But, forasmuch as many are apt to go to the Lord's Table *without due consideration*, and too many do make the trouble of *examining and preparing themselves* a reason for their not going so often as they should do, (that is, as often as they have an opportunity;) it will be proper to consider, *what preparation is required of those that would go worthily to the Lord's Supper.*

Our Church has indeed given us a *short and sure* rule and answer to that question, provided we take pains to understand it; but the truth is, it is too often mistaken, both by those that are *presumptuous*, and by those that are *lazy*, and not disposed to consider.

By the *presumptuous*, it is made a matter of *mere form*; and by the *lazy* it is looked upon as a *burthen*, and to be avoided as much as possible: Both these are greatly mistaken, and betray a very great disregard for their own souls. And this we shall plainly see, now we come to consider, *what preparation is required of them who go to the Lord's Supper.*

And the first step to a good preparation is, TO EXAMINE OURSELVES WHETHER WE REPENT US TRULY OF OUR FORMER SINS.

Now, it is to be hoped that every Christian, who has had any tolerable instruction, was, *before he first received this Sacrament*, made sensible of the meaning and design of this Ordinance; and that it was intended to give Christians an opportunity of renewing, and laying claim to, that Covenant which



which our gracious God has made with man: Which Covenant is, that God, *on his part*, will upon our repentance pardon all our sins,—give us all necessary grace and assistance to do what he requires of us, and make us happy for ever, on condition that we, *on our part*, do forsake all our sins; that we sincerely endeavour to avoid every thing that we believe will displease God, and with the same sincerity endeavour to do what he has commanded us.

Any Christian, who was made sensible of this, would easily see, how necessary it was, that he SHOULD EXAMINE HIMSELF before he should presume to receive that Sacrament; that is, *that he should look into the state of his soul*, and see whether he had in any good measure, on his part, observed the conditions of this covenant,—whether he had lived a sober and a Christian life.

And forasmuch as a *great deal* depends upon this enquiry, *even the salvation of our souls*, a Christian will not think it too much trouble to examine himself after some such way as this:—

Have I considered,—That this life is a state of trial;—that we are upon our good behaviour; and that we shall be happy or miserable for ever, as we behave ourselves well or ill in this world?—That the design of the Christian religion is, to make us holy, that we may be capable of being happy; and that God, who sent me into the world, sent me to glorify him by an holy life?—That he sees all my actions, hears all my words, and knows the very secrets of my heart?—That therefore I ought not, at the peril of my soul, to do any thing which I believe will displease him?—That I ought to love God above all things, since it is from him I expect, and hope, to be made happy?—That if I do love him above all things, I shall always speak of him with the greatest reverence, honour his *Name*, his *Word*, his *Day*, his *Ministers*, and every thing that belongs to him?—And lastly, that I ought to trust in him, to pray to him daily, to give him thanks, and to submit to all his dealings with me?

If I am conscious to myself that I have not considered these things so seriously as I should have done, and consequently, that I have not *feared*, and *loved*, and *honoured*, and *worshipped* this great God, as his majesty and my duty required me to do; why then I shall most humbly beg his pardon, and his gracious assistance, that I may do it better for the time to come.

And forasmuch as I ought to make the law and will of God, as far as it is known to me, the rule of my life and actions, I am bound to examine myself, whether I have

really done so? Whether I have not hitherto lived in any known sin; been subject to any evil habit, either of *lying*, or *swearing*, or *intemperance*, or *impurity*, or an idle and a useless life? Whether I do honour my betters, and especially such as have the care of my soul; and do obey the lawful commands of my superiors? Whether I do indeed love my neighbour, and have neither *injured*, *hurt*, or *wronged* him, in body, goods, or good-name; nor taken advantage either of his ignorance or necessities? Whether I have been content with my condition, neither envying that of others, nor endeavouring to better my own by unjust ways?

A Christian, who finds himself faulty in any of these things, will, before he goes to the Lord's Table, sincerely repent of his sin; that is, he will beg God's pardon, and his grace, that he may *know* and *do* his duty more faithfully, most seriously purposing to lead a *new*, that is, a Christian life.

In order to this, he will take care to avoid all temptations to such sins as he has been most subject to. If through frailty or any violent temptation he happen to fall into sin, he will forthwith confess and forsake it, and be more careful for the future. And, knowing that without God's especial grace all his best purposes will come to nothing, he will be careful to beg that grace and assistance every day of his life.

And that he may be more sensible of the least thing that may displease God, he will endeavour to keep his conscience *tender* and *awake*; and keep a *watch* over himself, that he may not fall into the sins he has repented of.

Now, if this be done sincerely when a person first receives this Sacrament, why then to examine himself every time after—is to consider and see whether his life has been answerable to this good beginning?

If so, why then he is, *as to his repentance*, very well qualified to receive the Lord's Supper worthily as often as he can have an opportunity.

But if, upon looking into the state of his soul, he finds that he has fallen into any wilful sin,—that he has been led away by his lusts, and has used no just endeavours to master them,—he must, as he hopes for mercy, take care that his repentance be more sincere: That is, he must lay himself under much stricter obligations,—he must make his repentance bear some proportion to the sin of *backsliding*,—and, by fasting and self-denial, make his return to sin more frightful and uneasy, and a Christian life more welcome, and to be embraced before the ways of sin, which require so painful a remedy, before he can hope for any safety.



The next step to a WORTHY PREPARATION is, *to enquire into the nature of our faith*, WHETHER WE HAVE A LIVELY FAITH IN GOD'S MERCY THROUGH CHRIST. A *lively faith*; that is, a faith which purifies the heart, a faith which produces *obedience* and *good works*; for that is the very life of faith, "Faith without works being dead."

Now, God's mercies to man through Jesus Christ are, *forgiveness of sins* to all that truly repent of them,—the *assistance of his Holy Spirit* to all such as do not grieve him by their evil deeds,—and a sure *promise of eternal life and happiness* to such as keep his commandments.

A man may indeed think that he believes these promises of God in Christ; but certainly he does but deceive his own heart, if his faith has not its natural fruits, which are, a *sincere repentance*, in hopes of pardon,—an *holy life*, which alone can secure the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,—and such an *earnest desire* after eternal life and happiness, as puts a man upon his best endeavours to attain them.

When a Christian, therefore, in order to prepare himself for the Lord's Supper, would examine into the truth of his faith, he ought to ask himself such questions as these:—Has God's promise of pardon upon my repentance produced in me *amendment of life*?—Do I find that I have been governed by God's good Spirit, by the assistance he has given me to lead a new, that is, a Christian life?—And lastly, have I not been diverted from labouring after eternal life, by the false appearances of happiness which we meet with here?

Any Christian, who will but ask himself such questions as these, will easily know whether his *faith in the mercies of God through Christ* be such as it should be; that is, whether his faith has had its saving effects. If so, then he is always prepared for this Holy Ordinance.

The next enquiry a Christian is to make is, WHETHER HE HAS A THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE AND SENSE OF CHRIST'S DEATH? And indeed, whoever will but consider how very sad our condition must needs be, when no less a sacrifice would satisfy the justice of our offended God, and restore us to his favour, than the death of his own Son: Whoever considers this, cannot but remember *that death* with a very thankful heart; since, on account of that sacrifice, God is pleased to overlook the untowardness of our nature,—to forgive us our sins,—to look upon us as his children,—to give us all the assistance we shall want; and, if we behave ourselves as becomes his children, he will, for his sake, make us happy for ever.

In short, Jesus Christ, by his death, has redeemed us from damnation. Whoever considers the meaning of that word, cannot but be very thankful. But then let us at the same time remember, that, as we hope for any benefit by his death, we must suffer him to redeem us from this present evil world,—to make us holy, that we may become worthy to escape so great a misery.

The last enquiry which a Christian ought to make, is this, WHETHER HE BE IN CHARITY WITH ALL MEN? And a very necessary enquiry this will appear to be, when we remember, that our acceptance with God, and our salvation, depend upon our having such a good-will towards all men, as becomes members of the same family, of the same body, of the same hope and faith.

Every serious Christian will therefore, before he goes to the Lord's Table, ask himself some such questions as these:—Do I know of any person to whom I bear any grudge or ill-will?—Is there any person whom I have wronged, and to whom I ought to make satisfaction, as far as I am able?—Have I any enemies, for whom I cannot and do not pray, and am not disposed to be reconciled to, and to forgive them?—Am I ready to shew mercy and kindness to men, that I may be entitled to, and receive mercy from God?—Do I pretend to value my soul, and think this too hard a condition?

I will therefore most gladly close with this condition of pardon which Jesus Christ has ordained;—I will pray that God will inspire me with the grace of a forgiving temper;—that I may live in union, peace, and charity, with all the world.

And now, Christians, you will easily understand who they are that go unworthily to the Lord's Table; and who bring judgments upon themselves by doing so: Even all such as have no true sense of the blessing of a Redeemer, and consequently no true value or love for Jesus Christ;—all such as live in any known sin;—all such as are not sincerely resolved to live, and be governed, by the Laws of God;—all such as live at variance with their neighbours;—all such as have done wrong, and do not make restitution and satisfaction according to their power;—lastly, all such as go to the Sacrament in mere compliance with the laws and custom, without considering the ends and benefits of receiving:—All such go unworthily to the Lord's Table, and return without a blessing.

But that is not the worst. They bring an evil report upon the Ordinances of God, as if no good, no grace, attended them. They harden sinners, confirm infidels, and bring down certain judgments upon themselves.

In



In short ; it is according to the love that we have for Jesus Christ,—according to the care we take to obey his commands,—according to the sense we have of our deliverance, by him, from sin and hell,—according to the love we have for all whom he has redeemed, for all his household and family,—that we are *worthy* or *unworthy* communicants.

And this will best appear, not by the dispositions only with which we go to the Sacrament, but by the life we lead afterwards. For what an horrid crime must it be, to go to the Lord's Table, as Judas did, in order to betray our Lord? Or as those unthoughtful Jews did, who spread their garments before him, and *owned* and *proclaimed* him for their Messiah, and five days after called out to have him crucified?

And so surely do they, who blaspheme God with the same mouth, which a while ago received the pledges of his love in the blessed Sacrament, and pretended to give him thanks for this great instance of his love to mankind:—

So do *they*, who, forgetting all the *resolutions*, the *promises*, and *vows* they made at the altar, return again to their usual liberties; and having, as they vainly suppose, cleared off all old scores, go on, without any scruple, to contract new ones, in hopes of having them easily forgiven the next time they shall go to the Lord's Supper.

But, O blessed Jesus, was this *thy* design in appointing this Holy Ordinance? Was it to encourage sinners to hope for pardon without amendment of life? Was it for *this* thou sheddest thy most precious blood, that men might sin with greater security?

O, no!—But it was to convince us, how hateful sin is to God;—how unqualified sinners are for Heaven and Happiness;—how dreadful the condition of those is, who die in their sins unrepented of:—It was to convince us of these truths and of thine infinite concern for lost mankind,—that Thou, O Christ, becamest a sacrifice for us;—to restore us to the favour of our offended God, —to prevail with God to accept of our repentance,—to oblige us to live like people who hope for Heaven,—and to obtain for us the grace and power to do so:—

It was, to make us ever mindful of these mercies, and to preserve the memory of thy death;—and to give us an opportunity of pleading the merits thereof before God,—for the pardon of our sins,—and for grace to amend where we had done amiss:—

It was for these reasons, that Thou, O Saviour, didst ordain this Holy Sacrament to be administered and received by all Christians till thy coming again to judgment.

How great then must the sin of those be, who neglect to administer, and of those who turn their backs upon, this Holy Ordinance!

We may indeed do as Naaman did, when the Prophet bid him go and wash himself in Jordan. We may question whether an action so plain and easy can possibly be attended with so many and great blessings; and we may, through our infidelity, lose all those blessings, as he would have done, had he not been better advised.

But Christians, who have any consideration and love for their own souls, will *not lightly esteem*, or *turn their backs upon*, this Holy Ordinance; because if they know any thing, they must know, that their salvation depends upon it; “and that it is this Blood of Christ which cleanseth us from all sin:”—That we can hope for no share in the merits of Jesus Christ, but by closing with this means of grace which he has ordained;—that the *Lord's Supper* is to Christians what the *Tree of Life* was to Adam in Paradise;—and that as he, when for his transgression he was deprived of that food which was designed to make him immortal, as he was left in his pure natural condition, utterly unable to attain eternal life;—even so shall we, if we partake not of *this food*, *THIS BREAD OF LIFE*, as our Lord calls it:—We are no more capable of attaining Heaven and Happiness, than he was of returning to Paradise after he was cast out.

The reason is plain:—Without a supernatural grace, no mortal man can attain to a super-natural state and condition. This grace is given us in baptism, as the Tree of Life was to Adam, and can only be preserved by obeying this command of Jesus Christ. For, saith he, “Except ye eat the Flesh,” the Sacramental Flesh, “of the Son of Man, and drink his Blood,” his Sacramental Blood, “ye have no life in you;” that is, nothing but this can sustain the divine life of a Christian.

In short, this is the only way to continue in covenant with God; that is, to be one of his family,—one of his care,—under his especial protection;—one who has a promise of and a right to the kingdom of Heaven, by virtue of this Covenant.

St. Paul<sup>s</sup> styles this Sacrament *THE COMMUNION OF THE BODY OF CHRIST*; that is, it is that Ordinance by which we have fellowship with Jesus Christ and with all his members. By this we own to all the world, that we belong to Christ. And then let us remember, that if we do not belong to Christ, we do belong to a much worse master.

“The branch,” saith our Lord, “The branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless

o 1 John i. 7. p John vi. 26. q 1 Cor. x.



"it abide in the vine:—No more can ye, except ye abide in me." Now, can any thing render Christ more effectually present with, and united to us, than this ordinance; whereby we are made one with Christ, and Christ with us?

The Paschal Lamb was to the Israelites what this Sacrament is to Christians. There was no hopes of security for any Israelite, who had not the Blood of the Lamb upon his door, and who did not ever after keep up the memory of his deliverance by that sacrifice. And will Christians hope for mercy without doing what Christ has ordained in memory of his death, and our much greater deliverance?

And remember this, I beseech you, for a certain truth,—That generally speaking, whatever it is that hinders people from going to the Sacrament will hinder them from going to Heaven. Such are these:—A careless indifference for their soul's welfare,—an unwillingness to look into their spiritual

<sup>r</sup> John xv. 4.

estate,—a great love for the world and its idols, and an unwillingness to renounce them,—a faint purpose of doing it some time or other.

These are too often the true causes of men's turning their backs upon this Holy Ordinance, or of coming to it with an indifference and indevotion which betrays the want of a true sense of the blessings which they might receive from it.

May God Almighty grant, that all who now come to partake of this Holy Sacrament may receive the remission of all their past sins,—be confirmed in all goodness,—receive all the graces necessary for their present condition,—may be filled with the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and receive this Holy Sacrament as a pledge, as an earnest, of a blessed resurrection, and of a life eternal, for Jesus Christ's sake, whose death we now commemorate. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, dominion and power, now and for ever.

## S E R M O N LXXVII.

### A FREQUENT RECEIVING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED.

I C O R. xi. 26.

*For as often as ye eat this Bread, and drink this Cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

**I**T will hardly be expected that I should say any thing upon these words, or upon *this subject*, that has not been said before; neither indeed is it necessary. If we can so represent the duties of Christianity, as that they may be apprehended by all sorts of hearers, and that they be often and seasonably put in mind of them; it is all that the Ministers of Christ can do.

Our meeting now is in order to be instructed concerning the meaning, the nature, and ends, of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Those that have lived in the faithful use of this ordinance will not expect any further information; the rest will only hear what every Christian should know.

I am verily persuaded there is no Christian, who seriously hopes to be saved, that would ever lightly turn his back on the Holy Sacrament, if he *understood* and *considered* the meaning, the necessity, and the advantage of receiving worthily;—and that there is no danger of receiving unworthily, if a man does but come with an honest heart,

and purposes to serve God to the best of his understanding and power.

Now; to lay this matter plainly before you, is what, by God's good blessing, I shall endeavour to do at this time. And though I am not sure that I shall satisfy every body that hears me, yet I do believe, that every person of the most ordinary understanding, who shall seriously attend to what I am going to say, and who heartily desires to be informed concerning this duty, will be convinced of the truth of *these following particulars*:—

*First*; That to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is one of the most necessary duties of the Christian religion.

*Secondly*; That as the receiving of the Lord's Supper is a necessary duty, so it is one of the easiest to be understood by any person who in good earnest desires to be saved.

*Thirdly*; That as it is most easy to be understood, so it may be worthily and safely received



received by the most unlearned Christian, to his great and endless comfort.

*Lastly*; That therefore, generally speaking, whatever it is that hinders people from coming to the Sacrament, will likewise hinder them from going to Heaven.

I. To begin with the first of these particulars: *That to receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is one of the most necessary duties of the Christian religion.*—Now, in order to make this appear, I observe,

*First*, That the knowledge and remembrance of Christ's death is that on which all the other duties of Christianity depend.

The reason why we confess our sins to God, and hope for pardon, is, because we remember that "we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son;" and that "the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin."

We hope for good at the hand of God, but then it is because we call to remembrance, "that he who spared not his own Son, but hath given him up for us all, will with him freely give us all things."

In a word; we should neither have hearts to look up to God, nor confidence to expect any thing from him, nor grace to be thankful, but that Christ, by his death, has given us a right to do so:—And therefore his death we ought ever to have before our eyes.

*Secondly*; The remembrance of Christ's death in the Sacrament is the only support of sinful men. It is not indeed every body that is sensible of the blessing of a Redeemer; but if once men come to consider seriously that they are sinners, and to believe in earnest that no sinner can go to Heaven without a share in the merits of Christ, they will then know for a truth, that there is no rest for their souls, but by coming to Christ, and thankfully using the means of grace which he has appointed.

It may be, that people may think that the death of Christ may be remembered without receiving the Lord's Supper; but they ought to consider, that there is a great deal of difference betwixt knowing that Christ died for mankind, and applying that knowledge to one's self in particular. For the death of Christ is only a comfort to any person, so far as he can hope that he died for him; that is, so far as he knows that he hath done what Christ hath commanded him to do, in order to be pardoned.

I have seen many instances of this truth. I have seen people under great affliction of mind, doubting the pardon of their sins. And though the Gospel of Christ, and the express promises therein contained, have

been laid before them; namely, that "if we confess our sins, God is faithful (to his promise) and just to forgive us our sins:—That all that believe in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Yet these promises could yield them no comfort; not that they doubted the truth of them, but because God did not, for that time, vouchsafe them grace to apply these promises to themselves.

The case was just thus with the people of Israel. They were stung by serpents;—Moses was ordered by God to set up a serpent of brass, with a promise, that whoever in their misery should look upon it, should be healed. It was indeed a general blessing to know this; but nobody had any comfort or share in this blessing, but those that made use of the means, and went out to look upon it;—*they only* were healed.

Why now let us apply this:—We are sinners. Every man knows this for himself. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. For *his* sake, God has made us many great and precious promises. The Holy Sacrament is the means of applying these promises to every man's own case,—by remembering the death of Christ after a solemn manner, and owning him for our Lord.

Now, whoever neglects to do what Christ hath commanded, will not surely expect those mercies and favours which he has promised in order to obtain them.—But,

*Thirdly*, The receiving of the Lord's Supper is a most necessary duty, because it is the only means of continuing in covenant with God.

People do not consider what it is to be in covenant with God;—That it is to be one of his church and family;—to be under God's especial protection and government;—to have a right and title to the kingdom of Heaven.

Now, are these blessings to be despised? And yet how many are there, who would rather die than expressly renounce the Christian religion, who do in truth renounce all its blessings, by despising the means of grace appointed by Christ?—

Let me therefore recommend one thing to your serious consideration:—Whoever holds not Communion with Christ is under the government of the devil; and therefore the Gospel is said to turn men from Satan to God; that is, to take them from under his government and service,—to make them God's servants,—and to put them under his especial protection.

Now, to neglect the Lord's Supper is in a manner to renounce Communion with

<sup>a</sup> Rom. v. 10. <sup>b</sup> 1 John i. 7.

<sup>c</sup> Acts xxvi. 18.



Christ: "The bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the body of Christ?" That is, Is it not that action by which we declare to all the world that we belong to Christ?

*Lastly*; The necessity of this duty appears from the necessity of keeping up the remembrance of the death of Christ in the church of God.

Why, could the world ever forget the sufferings of Christ, and the reasons of his sufferings? Yes; as well as the children of Israel could forget the wonders which God had done for them. Nay, they forgot God himself, as well as his mercies. And indeed we know not what we should forget, if we should once forsake the ordinances of God.

We know, by faith,\* "that God made of one blood all nations of the earth;" all which sprung from one who knew the true God, and taught his children how to serve him; and yet there are many whole nations where the true God is neither known nor worshipped.

But we need not go so far for examples:—Are there not persons who, by forsaking the laws of God, forget that they are Christians, and live like heathens;—forget that they are men, and live like beasts? Therefore God, who knows our frailties, has in great mercy commanded us to remember the blessings of Christ's death, by a way easy to be understood, easy to be performed, and yet dangerous to be neglected.

II. Now; that *the receiving of the Lord's Supper is one of the easiest duties to be understood*, is what I next come to shew:

Though people for the most part own, that to receive the Sacrament is a necessary duty, because it is a means of grace and salvation,—and they know that to expect salvation without using the means is not reasonable; yet they look upon it as a duty very hard to be understood; and this is often to them a reason for not setting about this duty. They have a reverence for this Sacrament, but then it is such a reverence as they have for some great prince, of whom they never expect to know more than the name.

Now, I will endeavour to shew you, that there is nothing required to be known concerning the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, but what any person of the most ordinary understanding, who does but desire to know his duty, may comprehend, and that without much study or learning.

To satisfy you that it *must* be so, do but consider—That the Lord's Supper is a pledge to assure us of the Love of God for all mankind;—that Jesus Christ, who appointed

this Sacrament for the benefit of *all mankind*, knew that the greatest part of men were unlearned, and not able to understand, or remember, any thing that is difficult;—that therefore he must require such things as well-meaning persons, without much learning and study, might know, or else the greatest part of men could never know their duty. And indeed so it is in this very Sacrament: There is nothing required by Christ to be known, but what any serious person may know, to the salvation of his soul, as well as the most learned.

When Jesus Christ was going to be made a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, he ordained this Sacrament to keep up the perpetual memory of his precious death until his coming again. Hear the very words of Christ himself by his Apostle St. Paul: "The Lord Jesus, the same night that he was betrayed, took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: This do in remembrance of me."

Now, what is there in this command that requires much learning to understand? Does not every body at first sight apprehend, that that which is required of Christians is, to meet together, to break and eat bread after a religious manner; that is, with prayer and thanksgiving;—to do this in remembrance of Christ's death;—and to believe assuredly, that God's blessing will attend their doing so?

Here seems to be no difficulty in this, and yet he that understands this, knows as much as is necessary to be known,—as much as the Gospel requires to be known, concerning this duty.

It would but distract you to no purpose, to use more words; if you do but know what Christ has commanded, and do but resolve to do it to the best of your power, believing that God can and will bless his own ordinances, you know enough to have his blessing, and that is what the wisest will be well content with. I will only, therefore, give you one plain instance to make this easy to your understanding:—

Naaman an Assyrian,\* being afflicted with a leprosy, was advised to go into the land of Israel, to a Prophet of God, for a cure. He did so. The Prophet only orders him to go to the next river, the river Jordan, and wash himself in it seven times. This displeased the man very much, thinking with himself, that if a little common water could heal him, there was no need of coming so far for it. Now, here was his ignorance and fault:—He did not consider, that though the water of Jordan could not cure him, yet

\* 1 Cor. x. 15. \* Acts xvii. 26.

\* 1 Cor. xi. 23. \* 2 Kings, v.



God's blessing upon the Prophet's directions might do it. And when his servants prevailed with him to follow the Prophet's orders, he found himself cured in a moment.

Now, to apply this:—Christ commands us to receive this Sacrament, and when we do so, to remember, that he died for the good of all mankind that would obey his commands. He bids us believe this, and that he will bless us if we do our best.

Why now, what have we to do, but to consider what Christ has commanded,—to resolve to do our parts,—and to believe and trust his word and goodness, that a blessing will follow our doing so?

We may, indeed, do as Naaman did,—raise objections, and doubt whether it is likely that the doing so common a thing can procure us such great benefits as we are promised we shall receive thereby; but then we should be much to blame, and should hinder our own happiness. It is not mere bread and wine, but bread and wine made the body and blood of Jesus Christ in effect and power, though not in substance, that can procure us the blessing we desire.

So that whoever knows thus much, knows enough to come worthily to the Sacrament, and shall be a worthy partaker of the most blessed body and blood of Christ, provided his heart be right, and that he will do his best according to his knowledge.

III. And this brings us to the third particular: *That as this duty is most easy to be understood, so it may be worthily and safely performed, and received, by the most unlearned Christian, to his great comfort and benefit.*

We have a very plain, and a very short direction, by which we are to fit ourselves for this Sacrament:—We are to repent us truly of our sins past;—we are to come to the Sacrament with a full purpose of leading a Christian life for the time to come;—we are to rely upon God for pardon and grace for the sake of Christ, whose death we then remember;—and we are to forgive, and to love, and to do good to others, since God is so good and so kind to us.

Whoever can but do these things, nay, whoever will but *do his best* to do them, will be a worthy partaker of the Lord's Supper, which is the greatest encouragement and comfort that the heart of man can desire. For God expects no more of any man, but that he make an honest use of that measure of grace and understanding which God has given him.

Let a man's understanding be never so mean, his faith weak, and his ability for the present small; yet, if he is but heartily convinced that he is a sinner,—if he is sorry

that he is so, and desires that God would pardon him, and resolves but to do what he can to please God, and to gain his favour,—such a person is in a way of salvation, and may come, and ought to come, to the Holy Sacrament, and will be a worthy communicant.

And the reason is this:—Whatever grace, or saving knowledge, the best of us have, it is all God's gift. Those to whom God has given much, from them he will require much, and he will be well pleased with little from them to whom he has given little; only this he requires from all, that they should use the grace he gives.

For this is God's way of dealing with men:—They that make use of his grace and favour shall have more, and they that neglect it shall be left to themselves.

Now, since Faith and the Grace of God are ordinarily wrought in our hearts by preaching the Word; I will lay the Word of God plainly before you, that you may see the necessity and the advantage of doing these things, which are required of them that come to the Lord's Supper: And may his good blessing make his own word effectual for the conversion of those that do not yet see their duty!

It may be, you do not find your heart sensible of the great evil and danger of sin, and therefore you cannot *truly repent of it*. But do but consider what it is to sin:—That it is to break the laws of the God of Heaven, who has declared, that he will call all men to an account, and give to every man according to his works; and they that have done evil, and do not repent, shall perish, shall go into everlasting misery, where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

Now, is this a condition that any man in his right mind can be easy in?

On the other side, do but consider what it is to repent:—It is to confess that I am indeed a sinful creature,—that I have broken the laws of God,—but that for the future I will strive against sin, and endeavour to do what I believe God would have me to do, that he may forgive me according to his promise,—that he may be gracious to me, and bless me here,—and that I may be for ever happy in Heaven.

Are not these good reasons why one should earnestly pray to God that he would give us grace to repent, and why we should strive to forsake every evil way?

Now, this is the *first* thing required of those that come to the Lord's Supper.

The *second* is, that we purpose in our hearts to live like Christians. And sure any man



man who believes that this is the only way to be happy for ever, will be inclined to do so. There are difficulties, it is true, in a Christian life; but then God, who commands us to live well, can and will enable us to overcome them, if we earnestly desire his help, and do the best we can.

And, in the next place, will it not be very natural for us to have a thankful remembrance of Christ's death, when we consider that it is for the sake of Christ's death that God will be merciful unto us, and forgive us our sins?

And lastly; shall not we very cheerfully forgive all that have injured us, when we are asking God to forgive our great offences against him? Shall we expect a share of God's love, and afford none to our fellow-creature? Shall God give *us* a share of the good things of this world, and shall not we give a part to those poor creatures to whom he has denied these blessings?

The meanest capacities must see that these things are fit and necessary to be done: And they that are most apt to fear must be satisfied, that there is no danger of receiving unworthily, if a man does but mean well, and do his duty to the best of his power. Such a one may have his fears, but he cannot possibly be in danger, no more than a dutiful son can be in danger from a kind father, who sees him doing his best to please him.

It is required, indeed, that every body should come to the Sacrament with a quiet conscience; that is, he should be satisfied in his conscience that he is sorry for his offences against God and man;—that he purposes to do his duty to both for the time to come, to the best of his power, as God shall enable him;—and lastly, he is to be satisfied, that if he is sincere in this, God will be just to *his* promise; he will pardon, and assist, and bless him.

IV. And therefore, in the last place, generally speaking, *whatever it is that hinders people from coming to the Sacrament, will hinder them from going to Heaven.* I say, generally speaking, for there may be people under such invincible scruples or melancholy as may hinder them from coming to the Sacrament, and yet such as God in mercy will pardon, for he knows the secrets of men's hearts. But these cases are few, and those many people who neglect the Lord's Supper, do it for such reasons as will shut them out of Heaven if they do not repent and amend.

Such are these following:—A downright carelessness, or an indifference about religion, and the great concern of their souls: Or, secondly, an uneasiness to look into the

errors of their lives past: Or, thirdly, an unwillingness to reform for the time to come: Or, lastly, an imperfect resolution, that some time or other they will repent, and do what they ought, and so come to the Sacrament.

Whatever is pretended, these are for the most part the true reasons why people neglect to come to the Holy Sacrament. And it is too plain that these are reasons which will keep a man out of Heaven, as well as from the Lord's Supper.

I should not pretend to say that these are the true reasons of men's staying from the Sacrament, if their hearts were known; but that I know, by sad experience, that the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; and will deceive us by pretending that we have reasons for not doing our duty, when very often we have none, but an unwillingness to do what God has commanded.

But this will justify what I have said:—If people really have scruples, and are concerned for their salvation, they will endeavour to have them removed sometime. They have frequent notice, and are desired to do so, that they may receive with a quiet mind. And if they do not come to be satisfied, it is not any real scruple, but a real fault, a corrupt heart, which will keep them out of Heaven. And therefore, I do testify against all such persons as shall wilfully neglect this ordinance, that if they do not apply themselves for satisfaction, they have truly no scruples; but either they are under the power of a sinful life, and are unwilling to repent, or they are careless of themselves and God's ordinances.

I shall only add a few words upon this particular, to shew how much to blame people are for making scruples where there really are none.

One faith, I am not so well prepared as I ought, or as I could wish to be. Why now, learn from God's word what you ought to do under such fears as these.

The Passover was one of the Jewish Sacraments, which they were to eat after having duly prepared themselves. Now we find, [2 Chron. xxx.] that “a multitude of people had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the Passover otherwise than it was written: But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good Lord pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the Lord God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the Lord hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.” From whence it is plain, that if a man does but set his heart truly to seek God,



God, God will pardon a great many imperfections besides.

But suppose a person has some reason for staying some time from this duty; that reason ought not to hinder him a second time. Hear what God appointed to be done in a like case:—

The people of Israel are strictly commanded [Numb. ix.] to keep the Passover on the fifteenth of the first month; but if any person knew himself not prepared, according to the words of the law, to come then; he was not to fail to come the fifteenth of the second month, or else that soul was to be cut off. Here is a plain direction.

But, saith another, I do not find myself sufficiently humbled for my sins. But you know whether you desire to be so; if you do so in good earnest, you ought to go to the Sacrament; because humility, being God's gift, you are sure to find it in his own way.

But I am, say you, not sure that I can forsake my sins: You are, however, sure that you must leave them sometime, or you are undone for ever. Something you can do towards it. You can pray to God to enable you; and let any man be assured of this, that he who against his inclinations forces himself to go to the Lord's Supper, purely because he finds himself unable to keep God's commandments, such a person is better prepared than he is aware of. "Come unto me," saith Christ, "all that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you."

Here is true faith to come to God, and to depend upon him for help. For be assured, that it is more acceptable to God to do what we can, than to do nothing. This the Word of God has decided in that parable where the slothful servant is sent to a severe punishment, because he would not stir one foot to improve his talent, because he was afraid he should not please his Lord.

But my heart has deceived me, and I find that, notwithstanding my former purposes, I have fallen into sin. And you desire to know what to do? You shall be judge yourself:—A son promises his father never to disobey him; but afterwards he does. What is it that the father expects from this son? Why; that he should renew his promises, and endeavour to observe it better afterwards. Why now, God is our Father, and knows our infirmities, and pities us, and loves us, more than any man alive can love his son. And will not he forgive us, as often as we mean well?

This is our comfort in the midst of our imperfections, that God expects no more from us than he will enable us to do; but

this he does expect from all of us,—that we be sincere in what we profess, and that we go to him for help.

By the Sacrament of Baptism, God is pleased to enter into covenant with us;—we are made Christians, and are dedicated to God almost as soon as we are born: And that we may not lose the benefit of such an early dedication, the Church of God has provided, that as soon as we are capable of understanding our duty, we shall make good what was promised for us by solemnly taking it upon ourselves before the congregation.

Now, because it is possible for those who have thus engaged themselves to God's service to forget their vows; therefore has our Lord appointed *another Sacrament*, that of *The Lord's Supper*, in memory of his death; that in the conscientious use of this, men may satisfy the world and their own consciences that they continue to be members of Christ's church, &c.

But that men may not dissemble with God and his church, in coming to this Sacrament without full purposes of living like Christians, God has declared, that the danger is great of those who shall presume to receive unworthily; that is, without considering before, what it is they are going about. "They eat and drink their own damnation, not considering the Lord's body; they kindle God's wrath against them; they provoke him to plague them with divers diseases, and sundry kinds of death."

Here then is the case, *and it requires our most serious consideration*. If we do not receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, we are no longer Christians, and in covenant with God:—If we receive it unworthily, we are in danger of God's Judgments. So that there is no way for a man to take (who cares what will become of himself) but to endeavour to be a worthy partaker of this Holy Sacrament. To do this, these following things are required of us:—

*First*; A man must seriously consider, whether he does in truth desire to be saved? Whether he desires it so much as to take some pains to be saved?

*Secondly*; He must consider, that no man can be saved, who cannot resolve to leave his sins, and honestly endeavour to keep God's commandments:—And,

*Thirdly*; Because no man can be saved by his own merits, but only by the merits of Christ; therefore he is to consider, that it is necessary to depend entirely upon Christ for grace to do what is required of us, and to take the way of obtaining this grace which he has appointed.



Now, if I do indeed desire to be saved;—if I can seriously resolve to be at any pains about it;—if I can in good earnest purpose to part with my sins, which are offensive to God, and which will keep me out of Heaven;—and if I do purpose in my heart to lead a good life, according to that measure of knowledge and strength which God shall give me;—then may I come worthily to the Lord's Table;—there I may confidently expect that God will pardon all my former sins for the sake of Jesus Christ;—there I may promise myself new supplies of grace and strength, to enable me to work out my salvation;—and I may look upon that Sacrament as a sure pledge, that God will make all his promises good to me, of grace here, and of Heaven hereafter.

So that you see there is no great learning required to make a person a worthy communicant. The great matter lieth in being truly convinced of the danger of continuing in sin, and in possessing our souls with a great desire of pleasing God, and going to Heaven.

Nor is it necessary that a man should have a great deal of time to spare to fit himself for this duty; for he that is at his labour, and getting bread for his family, if his heart be right, and if he depends upon God for a blessing, is doing a work in its kind as acceptable to God, as he that is at his prayers.

And is this all that is required? You will be satisfied it is so, when I have put you in mind of the direction which the Holy Scriptures (which are always our best guide) afford us concerning this matter.

St. Paul and Silas<sup>a</sup> are cast into prison; the Keeper of the prison, being terrified by an earthquake, begins immediately to think of a world to come, and asks the Apostles, "Sirs, what shall I do to be saved?" The Apostles tell him what he must do; that he

<sup>a</sup> Acts xvi.

must believe, and repent of his sins, that he *might* be saved. He professes his belief in Christ, and immediately he was baptised and all his house.

Now, here is a man and his family, and such a family as are not commonly the most orderly;—here they are admitted to one Sacrament, upon a good purpose of living like Christians.

And why may not we come to the other Sacrament as worthily, if we have but the same good dispositions as this man had? No doubt of it, we may.

And the conclusion of all this will be, that the best preparation for the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is an honest purpose of heart of serving God to the best of one's power.

But then the case is not the same with those who have often renewed their vows, and often broke them: Something more is required of them;—they ought to consider seriously what it is to break their vows;—that the guilt and the danger is exceeding great;—that therefore they ought to be very careful for the time to come not to fall into such relapses. With these purposes they ought to come again to the Holy Communion; and God, who is very merciful to those who sincerely purpose to lead a new life, will graciously pardon them.

And now you see what a blessing it is, that we have always a cure ready at hand for the sorrow that arises in a heart sensible of its corruptions, and thoughtful of what may come hereafter.

And God Almighty grant, that none of us here present may ever despise the means of grace so mercifully provided for us.

And the good Lord fit us all, by his Sacraments here, for Heaven hereafter, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To whom, with the Father &c.



## S E R M O N LXXVIII.

A CHARITY SERMON.

GOD'S GOODNESS TO MEN THE FOUNDATION OF THE LOVE THEY OUGHT TO HAVE FOR HIM, AND FOR HIS SAKE, FOR THEIR NEIGHBOUR.

LUKE vii. 41, — 48.

*There was a certain Creditor which had two Debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty: And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me, therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged. And he turned to the Woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman, since the time I came in, hath not ceased to kiss my feet. Mine head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, HER SINS, WHICH ARE MANY, ARE FORGIVEN; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, THY SINS ARE FORGIVEN.*

**T**O have this sentence from the mouth of the Son of God, and Judge of the world,—what a surprising comfort must it needs have been to this poor penitent! And yet this is our happiness, and we do not consider it; this is the very case of every penitent sinner, who goes to God, with an heart full of love and gratitude for the mercies offered us in Jesus Christ. The very same sentence, *THY SINS ARE FORGIVEN THEE*, as certainly passes in Heaven upon every penitent so disposed, as if we heard it from our Saviour's own mouth:—The only question is, *Who is it that may expect so happy a sentence?*

In order to give a more satisfactory answer to this question, we shall consider the occasion of these words, and the reasons upon which this sentence was founded.

The OCCASION was *this*:—Our Lord was invited to dine with a certain Pharisee: While they were at meat, a woman of that neighbourhood, who was (not only in the opinion of that Pharisee, but in her own judgment) a great sinner, came to Christ, and in a most affecting manner, instead of washing his feet with water, (a common civility in those hot countries) she did it with her tears, discovering by *this*, and her other behaviour, a great respect, and an unusual affection. The Pharisee, who would have been very uneasy to have had a person of this woman's character so near himself, is surprised to see our Lord so little concerned

at it; and faith within himself,—If this man were a Prophet, as it is said he is, (that is, if he is *the great Prophet*, whom God by Moses promised to send to his people) he would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him, *for she is a sinner*, and consequently not fit to come so near an holy man.

Now our Lord, to convince the Pharisee that *he was THAT VERY PROPHET*, lets him know, that he not only knew what manner of woman *she* was, but even what passed in *his* breast, WHICH NONE BUT GOD COULD KNOW. And to make him in a more lively manner sensible of a great mistake he laboured under, in a very friendly and affecting way, he repeats this parable, and leaves it to him to make the inference.—“There was,” faith he, “a certain creditor which had two debtors; the one owed him a very great sum, ten times as much as the other: and when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.—Which of them will love him most?” The Pharisee answered, “I suppose he to whom he forgave most.”—“In this,” faith our Lord, “thou hast rightly judged.”

And now hear this woman's case:—She was indeed a great sinner;—she became a sincere penitent;—and one, who she knows has power to forgive sins, has pardoned her. This makes her express her concern, her love, and gratitude, after so uncommon a manner. For the language of all these tears,



tears, and this humility, is plainly this:—My sins were so many and great, that I had been for ever undone, had not God touched my heart with a sense of the danger I was in:—By his grace, I see the *evil*, the *folly*, and the *ingratitude*, of sinning against so good and gracious a God and Father:—By his Son, who sees the sincerity of my heart and repentance, I am sure that all my past offences are forgiven; and my heart is full of love and gratitude for so mighty a favour, which I cannot but express by all ways which I can hope will be acceptable to God.

*This was the occasion of this parable.*

And the REASON on which our Lord founded *this sentence*, “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” was *this*:—She shewed that she was a *true penitent*, “by works meet for repentance;”—such works as were most proper upon that occasion to *shew her sincerity*. Our Lord knew the secrets of her heart, and so could pass a *positive sentence*; and yet he did not think fit to do so, until, by her behaviour, she did that which might convince every charitable observer that she was seriously resolved to lead a new life.

And this, no doubt, was to direct the Ministers of his kingdom how to behave themselves upon the like occasion. He purposed to invest his Ministers, to the end of the world, with a power of *binding* and *loosing*,—of speaking peace to dejected penitents,—and of giving them such assurances of pardon and forgiveness, as their repentance might warrant them to do. He, in his infinite wisdom, foresaw what *ill use proud man might make of this power*;—he would therefore, *by this instance*, teach his faithful stewards not rashly to pronounce any sentence in his name,—but to wait till God, by the powerful working of his grace, should so effectually convince the sinner of the error of his ways, that he should give proofs of his repentance *by works answerable to amendment of life*. Then his ministers need not fear passing a righteous sentence, nor the sincere penitent doubt of the truth and comfortable effects thereof.

For this is a *certain truth*,—that the grace of God evermore accompanies the ministrations of his servants, and attends his own ordinances, if there be nothing to hinder it on the part of those that expect benefit by the use of them. And therefore it is no small comfort and advantage (how much soever it has been flighted) for such as are under afflictions of mind, to have the judgment of God’s minister upon their case, and the benefit of absolution; for though none but God, *the searcher of hearts*, can pronounce this sentence, *Thy sins are forgiven thee*; yet his Ministers, who have carefully

studied his Holy Word, can assure sinners of God’s pardon, and can pronounce a righteous sentence upon what appears;—which sentence a penitent may depend on to his great peace and comfort, provided he knows he has been sincere in discovering his malady, and in following the advice of his spiritual guide.

It is true, there are people who have abused this power, to the ruin, it is to be feared, of an infinite number of souls. When men rashly pronounce a sentence of pardon, upon a bare confession of sins, and upon a promise of better obedience, without waiting to see whether such promises are like to be followed by works meet for repentance, without which the pardon is rash, and the sinner deluded: This is indeed an usurped authority; but ought not to depreciate those true powers with which Christ has invested his faithful ministers,—of pronouncing the sentence of truth on earth, which he will ratify in Heaven.

But to return to the Parable, upon which we may make these following observations:

*First*; That all mankind are in the condition and circumstances of one of these two debtors: We have all of us offended God more or less, and are all accountable to his justice.

*Secondly*; That the best of men have nothing wherewith to satisfy for their offences, or to appease the justice of God:—*We have nothing to pay.*

*Thirdly*; Notwithstanding this, God is so gracious and merciful, as to forgive all such as are sensible of their own inability, sorry for the debt they owe, apply to him for his compassion and forgiveness, and will strive to regain and to deserve his favour. *He frankly forgave them both.*

*Lastly*; We have here a rule given us, whereby we may judge of the sincerity of our faith and repentance, and consequently of the certainty that our sins are forgiven. For if we love God, so as to do what will please him, then are we sure our sins will never rise up in judgment against us. *Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her, for she loved much.*

I. Let us first consider, *that we are all in the condition of one of these two debtors*; that is, we have all offended God, and, without his favour and goodness, we are all undone. Hear what the Holy Scripture teacheth us upon this head:—“We are by nature the children of wrath;—a generation of evil-doers;—we love darkness rather than light, because our deeds are evil, and will not bear the light;—and the imaginations of our hearts are evil continually;” that is, this is the way they naturally bend.

And,



And though we should hope that God may overlook *this untowardness of our nature*, entailed upon us by the sin of our first parents, yet what a debt do we all owe for the *many, very many* actual transgressions of our lives?—the effects either of *base principles*, or a *loose education*, or *evil custom*; or from a *love of the world*, or *sensual pleasures*; by which God has been dishonoured, his laws despised, his infinite love abused, and his power and justice, as it were, *defied*.

And though we should any of us escape (as many, no doubt, have) those sins which lay waste the conscience, and are by all acknowledged to be damnable in their nature; yet we are still accountable, the very best of us, for the many opportunities we have lost of doing good,—of promoting the glory of God by our *good lives* and *good works*.

For these two things are certainly true:—That God has ordained good works, in which we should walk, and that the *unprofitable* as well as the *wicked* servant, will be cast into *outer darkness*.

So that we are accountable to God, not only for the *sins* we have committed, but for the *duties* we have omitted. In short; we are all DEBTORS TO GOD, not only for the *pardon of our sins*, but also for *the means of grace*, and for *the hope of glory*.

It is by the favour of God, and through the means of grace which he has appointed, that we know our duty;—that we are enabled to perform it acceptably, if it is not our own fault;—that when, through our own default, we have broken the Laws of God, we are not left without hopes of mercy and pardon,—but that God will accept of our repentance *if it be sincere*, receive us into favour again, and treat us as if we had never offended him;—and, what is the most astonishing instance of his goodness, he has given us an assurance of eternal life and happiness after death, if we will but suffer ourselves to be governed by him during this short life of trial, which is designed to fit us for Heaven. This is the mighty debt we owe.

II. Let us now see, *what we have, how we are able, to discharge it?* Why truly, as we are in the condition of these debtors with respect to our *obligations*, so are we with regard to our *ability*—WE HAVE NOTHING TO PAY.

This is a circumstance which ought to affect us very sensibly.—That God, knowing our inability, and that the very best of men have no merits, nothing of their own, whereby to satisfy for the debt they owe, does not expect from us what we have not to give,—*a full satisfaction for the blessings we have received*. He knew our poverty, and

therefore he himself found out a way to satisfy his own justice and demands.

Let us consider this circumstance of the love of God towards us more particularly.

We have many ways offended God,—we have no way of making him amends. He, whom we have provoked to punish us, is the first who proposeth a reconciliation. He does not only offer to *forgive us* upon the most reasonable terms,—upon terms which he himself will enable us to perform; but he has given us his faithful Word and Promise, that, if we will be persuaded and governed by him, he will make us happy beyond our greatest expectations. He sent his only Son into the world, to assure us of this;—who would never have left the joys of Heaven, nor taken the nature of man with all its miseries upon him, had not he known for certain, that if men were left to themselves, and to their own wild inventions, they would be most miserable both in this life and the next.

For what strange ways did they, with all their boasted reason, take to satisfy the justice of God, and to appease his anger, whom they had provoked by their sins? They sacrificed the best of their substance,—they often sacrificed their very children,—to make their consciences easy under the burthen of their offences;—and yet, after all, their minds were not satisfied.

The merciful God saw and pitied this mournful condition of his helpless creatures, and *knowing their inability to help themselves*, he therefore himself found out a way for their redemption;—he sent his only Son with terms of pardon, freely forgiving all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him, and accept of the terms of their deliverance.

III. The GREAT CREDITOR OF THE WORLD FORGIVES US FRANKLY:—Forgives, not only those who have committed the fewest offences, but even those whose sins are great and innumerable;—not only those offences which are the effect of our infirmities, but even *wilful presumptuous sins*, for which, *under the Law of Moses*, there was *no atonement*. In a word; he is ready to forgive us those sins, which, if we are in our right mind, we can never be easy, until we have some reasonable hopes, and even assurance, that they will be forgiven.

But can we have any such assurance? Yes, most certainly; as much as this happy penitent had, that *her* sins were forgiven her.—And this brings us to the next inference from the text:—

IV. *That we have here a rule, a test, given us, by which we may be able to judge of the*



*sincerity of our faith and repentance*; that is, of our religion, and consequently of our salvation.

For if indeed we *love God*; that is, if we endeavour to keep his commandments, (for that is the only way of expressing our love of God, as he is our Lord and Lawgiver)—then may we be well assured, that we believe in him as we ought to do, and that we have truly repented of those sins, which, by the grace of God, we resolve never to repeat again. And happy it is for us poor mortals, that the terms of our salvation are so easy to be understood.

Christians might be confounded with the nice disputes concerning *Faith* and *Repentance*; but there is no manner of difficulty in knowing whether we resolve to live up to that measure of knowledge and power which God has given us; and seriously purpose to make use of *the means*, which in his Word he hath ordained for our salvation.

For though God has freely, upon our repentance, forgiven us what is past; so that, unless it is our own fault, our sins shall never rise up in judgment against us; yet still this mighty favour is vouchsafed on *conditions*:—On condition, that we become the faithful servants of that God who has been so good to us;—on condition, that whenever hereafter we shall be so unhappy as to fall into any sin, through *ignorance*, *surprise*, or any other temptation, we do immediately return to God, implore his pardon, make new resolutions of obedience, and be more careful to keep them for the time to come;—on condition, that we forgive others as we hope for forgiveness from God;—on condition, that we neglect none of those helps which God has afforded us,—that we read or hear his word,—that we renew our vows and our covenant with him,—that we pray to him daily for what we want, and especially for grace to know and to do our duty,—that we will thankfully acknowledge his favours, and with submission receive what his providence shall order for us.

These are the *conditions* on which we are forgiven;—and if we perform these, we may be sure God has forgiven us.

Well, blessed God! if this parable doth truly set forth thy mercy and goodness to sinful men, as we are sure it does,—for they are the words of thy beloved Son,—how then may we all take heart and comfort? It is but confessing our *inability*, our *poverty*, our *unworthiness*, and an earnest desire of being forgiven, and resolving to live like men that have received such mighty favours, and bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, and the debt is cleared.

And can *I* read, or can *you* hear these words, and not be exceedingly moved with their importance?—Can a sinner hear of being frankly forgiven, and his heart not leap for joy?—Can the greatest of sinners hear that there is the same mercy even for them, and not be surprised with love and gratitude?

In one word; God would have the love of all his creatures. To gain our love, he has used these methods:—He has set before us the evil and the danger of sin;—he has offered us a full and free pardon of all our offences, on conditions most reasonable;—he has proposed to us very great happiness, and made it our own fault, if we come short of it. After this, he expects that we should love him in some measure proportionable to the blessings we have received, and do expect from him. For so, you see, did this worthy penitent in the history before us;—so do all people who are truly sensible of the obligations they lie under;—and so shall we too, if we understand, and be true to, our own everlasting interest.

We shall shew that we love God, (*for love will shew itself*) by always doing that which he has commanded,—that which we believe will please him. We shall always live in the fear of God, that we may not consent to known iniquity. “I have set God always before me, therefore I shall not fall,” saith the Psalmist. If at any time we fall into sin, (for there is no man that sinneth not) we shall remember the practice of the same holy man:—“I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.” We shall be very careful to call upon God by diligent prayer, by which we shall learn to love and depend on him.

Being thus disposed, his Holy Spirit will *direct* us in the way we should go,—*assist* us when we want help,—*awaken* us when we grow careless,—*correct* us when we forget our duty,—and will never forsake us until he bring us safe to Heaven, when all danger will be over, and we shall be for ever happy.

In the mean time, and in prospect of *this happiness*, it behoves every person here present, who is engaged in a sinful course of life,—to bethink himself, what he is like to suffer, by delaying his repentance;—that leaving his folly, and his sinful choices, he may learn by the example of *this penitent*, whose sins were many, not to despair of mercy, but to make all the haste he can to break his bonds,—to regain the favour of God,—that he may taste and see how gracious the Lord is,—how ready to forgive, how bountiful to reward, his sincere servants.

And happy surely are all such whom God vouchsafes thus powerfully to call from a  
state



state of sin and death;—happy are all those sinners, who are so wise as to obey his gracious call, and live to bring forth fruits meet for repentance!

But the ways of sin are extremely dangerous; and the return to righteousness, *difficult, irksome, hazardous, and uncertain.*

More happy therefore by far, and more safe, are the circumstances of those who, from their very youth, are taught to know and to fear the Lord their Maker: And commendable are the endeavours, and glorious will be the reward, of all such as any way contribute to so good a work!

It is true, all Parents stand charged, and are answerable for the good education of their children;—all Masters are in some measure accountable for the faith and manners of their servants;—and every Clergyman, who has a cure of souls, is obliged to extend his care to, and feed the lambs, as well as the sheep of Christ.

But, alas! when we consider, what an infinite number of parents there are, who know not their own duty;—what an infinite number of children there are, who have no parents, or none able, or not willing, to take care of them;—how many masters, who are no further concerned for their servants, than to have their labour and their time at their command;—and lastly, how many parishes there are so large, and unproportionable to the endeavours of the most careful pastor;—we may easily guess at the infinite number of souls, which must go to the grave *untaught*;—who know little or nothing of their errand into the world, or of the account they must give of their time spent in it, unless by some kind Providence of God they are otherways instructed.

And blessed be God, who has put it into the hearts of so many Christians of this, and other churches and nations, to set up *Charity Schools*, in order to enlarge the kingdom of Christ, and (by the good blessing of God) to weaken that of Satan.

And indeed had not *these*, and some other *worthy societies*, stood in the gap, to stop the growth of *ignorance, of profaneness, and infidelity*, and to provide proper remedies either to cure or to prevent them, most dismal, in all probability, must have been the face of religion in a few years; perhaps so deformed, and provoking, as to force God to remove *our* candlestick, as he has done many others; and to deprive us of *that light*, which we had made so ill use of.

For this is plainly the state of religion, and of its professors, at this day:—Too many of those, whom God has distinguished by honours and great estates, are extremely corrupted by his favours;—they forget the

God that raised them, the vows that are upon them;—they despise the means of grace and salvation which he offers them, and, by a wickedness worse than Pagan, they would have all others as much infidels as themselves.

On the other hand, there are a mighty number of people, whose circumstances are low and mean, whose understandings are slow, and whose opportunities of learning their duty are very few;—if any of these ignorant people better their condition in the world, prosperity is but a snare to them; and if they continue poor, they often only live to people the world with a posterity as ignorant as themselves.

In short; we often lament the darkness in which the Heathen world is involved, and pity the condition of those who know not the true God. In the mean while, we do not consider that even amongst ourselves, in the very throng of Christians, there are a great many who are in a manner utter strangers to the design of the Gospel, and entirely uninfluenced either by its *promises* or *threatenings*.

And much greater would have been the number of these unhappy souls, had not so many good people contributed their helping hand to rescue them out of this state of want and ignorance.

*For this good work I am now an Advocate*;—a work which *will* prosper as long as God has mercies in store for this nation, notwithstanding the evil report which Satan and his instruments have endeavoured to fix upon it. We need make no apology for calling those the instruments of Satan who have set themselves to *speak* and *write against the Charity Schools*, because these very people speak contemptibly of the *Word and Ordinances of God*,—confound men's notions of good and evil,—make these the fancies of men, rather than the consequence of eternal reason and truth.

But what is the reason of all this zeal against *Charity Schools*, and those that endeavour to support them? Why, they are afraid, that if the children of the poor are to have an orderly and Christian education, they shall want *beasts of burthen* (for such, by their way of arguing, they esteem them) *to do their drudgery*; that is, provided the rich can have the bodies and labour of the poor at their service, it is no matter what becomes of their souls. They do not consider, that the Christian instruction and education that children have in these schools is the likeliest method of making them—*better men and better servants*, obedient to their masters, true and just in their dealings, and to do their duty in that state of



of life unto which the providence of God shall call them. Neither have, I believe, these hard-hearted people considered, (and yet it may very probably come to pass) that, by the just judgment of God upon them for their infidelity and profaneness, their own posterity in the next generation may come to want that help and instruction which they now envy these poor children.

But I shall say no more on this head:—The work will commend itself; and if any unforeseen evil consequences creep into it unawares, when they are observed, they will, no doubt be guarded against without laying aside a design, and work, so well calculated for promoting the glory of the God, and the good of souls. And as such I recommend it to you, as the likeliest way to avert the judgments and draw down the blessings of God upon this church and nation.

For the great design of this charity is the very same with that of the Gospel,—“To turn men from darkness to light, and “from the power of Satan unto God.” And that, as in our daily devotions we pray *that the kingdom of God may come*, we may, by our hearty endeavours, and chearful contributions, strive to advance it in good earnest.

In order to *this*, we should endeavour to lay aside all selfish principles, which are apt to make us refer all things to ourselves. Let us rather look upon these children in the same light that God himself sees them; namely, as the work of his hands,—as part of his love and care,—as persons redeemed by the blood of his dear Son,—as members of Christ’s visible church,—as part of that body, which must suffer if any of its members suffer,—as creatures *capable* of eternal happiness, and yet *liable* to eternal misery: And then we shall think ourselves bound, by all the obligations of interest, of duty, of compassion, and of gratitude, to contribute towards giving them a Christian education,—towards supporting a charity whereby the bodies and the souls of the poor are regarded,—by which parents re-

ceive both relief and comfort in the care that is taken of their children;—and an infinite number of souls have been and are like to be rescued from the consequences of poverty and ignorance, which are, very often, vice and misery in this world, and eternal misery in the world to come.

And before I conclude, let me just put you in mind of the text, and the inferences made from it; namely, That as our love of God will always rise in proportion to the sense we have of the debt he has forgiven us, or that we expect he will forgive us; so, wherever there is a sincere love of God, it will evermore appear, according to our power, in acts of mercy and charity.

To conclude the whole:—It is by the favour of God that so many of us here present do want nothing that is needful either for our souls or for our bodies. Whatever we have cometh of God, and whatever we give, of his own do we give him. And happy will it be for us, if what any of us give upon these occasions may but atone for our many vain expences.

Happy would it be for us, if the frequent occasions of this kind, which we meet with, may make us more careful to husband the talents wherewith we are intrusted, that we may always be ready to offer some testimony of our love and gratitude to God, who has been so good and kind to us:—That, if it should ever be his pleasure to change our circumstances into a lower condition, we may have this comfort however, which will be no small one, that so much as we have given to God, and for his sake, to these good purposes, so much treasure we have laid up in Heaven:—For which place, may our merciful God prepare us all, by disposing us all to acts of mercy and piety, and in his good time bring us thither for the Lord Jesus’ sake.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.



## S E R M O N LXXIX.

A CHARITY SERMON, PREACHED AT ST. PETER'S, CORNHILL, SEPT. 28, 1711.

## THE ADVANTAGES ARISING FROM THE CHRISTIAN EDUCATION OF POOR CHILDREN, AND ESPECIALLY OF POOR GIRLS.

2 T I M. i. 4, 5.

—*That I may be filled with joy, when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy Grandmother Lois, and thy Mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.*

I HAVE made choice of these words of St. Paul, as the most proper I can think of, to recommend a *Charity* which seems to be chosen with so much judgment and foresight, that it only wants to be set in a *true light*, to have it approved and encouraged by all pious and well-disposed persons.

The *Charity* is that of educating a considerable number of *poor children*, destitute of means to support, and of friends to take care of them.

The *argument* I would make use of to recommend this charity, is that which very much affected the Apostle, and filled his heart with joy,—to see true religion and piety continued in a family for so many generations.

And that which is very observable, and which should encourage us to take the same care in the education of girls as of boys, or perhaps a greater, is this:—That the faith and piety here commended and gloried in were continued and propagated in the family by the women chiefly:—That *unfeigned faith*, and that zeal for the glory of God, which was found in Timothy, and which qualified him for a Bishop, or Overseer, in the Church of God, was derived to him from his Mother and Grandmother, whose instruction and examples he followed; and so became an instrument of great good to the world.

This, without more words, will justify those who have taken upon themselves the trouble and management, and in some measure the charge, of this *Charity*.

But that they may not be disappointed in the assistances and encouragements which they may justly expect from others; it will be proper to lay before you, in one short view, what effects they and you may very reasonably hope for, from this work so well begun and intended. And this I shall en-

deavour to do, by laying before you, and explaining these following particulars:—

*First*; That all thoughtful people will have reason to rejoice when TRUE RELIGION, the unfeigned faith here spoken of, is propagated in the world.

*Secondly*; That the best foundation of true religion is that which is laid in the sober education of youth. And,

*Thirdly*; Because this foundation is designed for the good of both sexes, and that you may see the advantage of giving girls a Christian education,—That Mothers are, generally speaking, the best instruments of such education, and are more capable than men of advancing this end.

That, therefore, the taking a particular care of Girls, and educating them in true religion, will be attended with the greatest advantages; and consequently, the zeal and charity of such as promote this good work is very commendable in the sight of God and man.

I. To begin with the first of these considerations:—*That all thoughtful people will have reason to rejoice, when true religion, or an unfeigned faith, is propagated in the world.*

They that have the publick most at heart find by experience, that people of false or of no principles do make but very indifferent members of the Commonwealth. If they come to have authority, as that sometimes happens, they have nothing to restrain them from making their own will their law, and their private interest their aim, in all they do. If they are in a lower condition, there is no wickedness they are not ready to run into, having no knowledge nor fear of God to keep them within bounds.—What must be the condition of a nation, where such as these make the greatest number? It is not the wisdom of the magistrate, nor the multitude of penal laws, nor a severity



a severity in putting them in execution, *can* secure the peace and happiness of such a state.

It is much otherwise where people have been instructed in the true faith and fear of God, let their lot in the world be what it will.

Such as know that they are accountable to God, for the abuse of the authority which he has given them, will be afraid to oppress, though it be in the *power* of their hand to do so.

Such as have been bred up in principles of Christian obedience will be afraid to *resist*, lest they should receive to themselves damnation, let men put never so favourable a sense upon those words.

And lastly, let people be never so poor, if they have had a Christian education, you shall see them—orderly in their families,—content with their condition, not desiring to better it by unjust ways, but living in hopes of better days *here*, or in full assurance that an amends *will certainly* be made them in the *next* world for what they want in *this*;—that in the mean time it is not worth their while to be factious and discontented, and uneasy to those whom God has set over them.

These are some of the many benefits the *publick* will have by people's being bred up in the principles of true religion.

But they that have the *Honour of God* most at heart will have more reason still to rejoice, when they shall see a *sincere faith and piety* propagated in the world.

It is part of our daily prayers, *that the Kingdoms of the world may become the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ*.—And shall we not endeavour, and shall we not be pleased, in “turning men from darkness to light, “and from the power of Satan unto God?” Otherwise it is to no purpose, nor any just expression of our piety, to lament the wickedness of the world, and the daily dishonour done to God and religion. It was an *unwary* reproach of the Scribes and Pharisees, “These people, that know not the “law, are cursed.” Pray, whose fault was it, that they *knew not* the law? Was the law so very hard to be understood;—or was it not the fault of those, who would not condescend to speak to the capacities of the meaner people who would not consider their circumstances, and provide suitably for their instruction?

If we see God dishonoured by the wretched and wicked lives of too many;—if we see people careless of their souls, and unconcerned for what may come hereafter;—we have too good reason to conclude, that these

people never had a distinct knowledge of their duty, of their dependance upon God, and of their being accountable to him.

If religion *will not*, let the regard we have to ourselves and families prevail with us to set forward this good work.

It is not generally taken notice of, the mischief that befalls us, by being in the neighbourhood of vice and impiety. Our Children are more or less infected by evil examples;—our servants are perpetually in danger of being corrupted;—our charge in maintaining useless hands daily increases;—and, which is not to be omitted, we are, or ought to be, under apprehensions of the judgments of God for the growing vices of the age, if we are not concerned to root them out.

In short; it is as true in ecclesiastical and civil bodies, as it is in the natural: *If one member suffer, all the members suffer with it*. There cannot be a great many wicked and loose people amongst us, but every body must feel an inconvenience more or less; and it is consequently the duty of every body to put to their helping hand, towards mending the principles and the manners of men of corrupt lives.

II. Now, that the best way of doing this will be,—*to take care of the growing age, to educate as many of the younger sort as we can, in sound principles and civil behaviour*,—is what we are to consider in the second place.

That which is called *Education*, amongst the better sort, is *too often* no more than a method of bringing their children acquainted with the world, that on one hand *they may not be singular*, and on the other, *that they may not be imposed on*.

How far this has contributed *towards bettering the world*, may be seen in the lives of such as have been thus educated; who, for want of being *restrained* in their youth,—for want of being rightly informed, and made truly sensible of their duty,—for want of examples of soberness and piety in those about them;—and lastly, for want of being brought up under a sense of their *dependance* upon God, of their *inability* to please him without his assistance, or of obtaining *that assistance*, without using the means of grace which he has appointed;—for want of *this*, for the most part, when they come to be masters of themselves, they run into ways entirely contrary to the *precepts* and to the *design* of the Gospel. Until *this*, therefore, can be mended, we must expect no great reformation, nor so many examples of industry and piety, *from that side*, as might be wished.

Perhaps, the best method of convincing men of the fault of such education, is what



we are of late fallen upon. For if poor children, destitute of *help, friends, and estates*, brought up in the knowledge and fear of God, with a moderate share of learning;—if very many of these shall become better men in their generations, more exemplary in their lives, more just in their dealings, more diligent in their callings, and more useful to the world than those of greater fortunes;—people will at last (it may be hoped) open their eyes, and see, *that the fear of the Lord is wisdom, and to depart from iniquity is understanding.*

And that we have good reason to believe that these will be the consequences of the methods taken to instruct poor children, even the short experience we have had may convince us:—Their *parents and friends* find them more dutiful and tractable,—their *masters* more diligent and faithful,—and the publick hereafter will find them more peaceable, than would have been expected from an undisciplined generation. For they are taken care of betimes, before *sin and hell* have got the dominion over them. By this means, religion and piety will become habitual to them; and they will be able, and with less reluctance, to embrace and follow what their growing reason approves.

Those that have made the experiment know very well, how hard it is to free one's self from the habits of vice contracted in our younger days; when the inclinations have been gratified, and the appetites let loose upon every thing that is desirable. It is not reason *then*, that will silence their cravings;—it is not the being convinced that we are in the *wrong*, and in *danger*, that will enable us to take up, and change our course;—we must *strive, deny* ourselves, *pray* for grace, and *resist* temptations; which people, unacquainted with these duties, are very hardly brought to do.

Happy are they, it is true, (*and God increase their number!*) who, from having been great sinners, become sincere penitents. But the ways of sin are extremely deceitful and dangerous; and the return to righteousness, too rare, too difficult, too irksome, and hazardous, to be trusted to.

More happy therefore by far, and more safe, is the condition of those, who from their very youth are taught to *know*, and *fear*, and *serve*, the Lord their Maker. And commendable are the endeavours, and great will be the reward, of such as shall promote so worthy a design.

III. *How this design may best be promoted*, is what we now come to consider:—

We have already said, and we now come to prove it, *That Mothers are generally the best instruments of such education, and are more*

*capable than men of advancing this end.* That therefore this Charity, which is employed in the Christian education of girls, will, of all others, have the best and the most lasting effects.

That Mothers, where they themselves have been well instructed, are *more capable than men*, of teaching their children, will appear from these considerations:—

First; *from their circumstances and condition of life*: They are more within doors, have often more time to spare, are best acquainted with their children's temper, and always have them in their eye.

Secondly; *They have an advantage from their own make and temper*: They are generally more apprehensive of danger, and of what may come hereafter, *than men are*. This makes them more concerned for their children's everlasting welfare, and solicitous to teach them what they know themselves. Then they are of a *milder disposition*, can bear with their children's infirmities, and correct them with a tenderness which even recommends a necessary severity. By this means their children come to love them, and to be fond of their instruction, and to imitate their example.

Besides all this, they are more *patient of this kind of labour* than men are. It is not the child's dullness, nor the necessity of often repeating the same things, which will weary or discourage the pious Mother.

And, *which is not to be omitted*, she has an opportunity of seeing whether her instructions are apprehended and followed, of *destroying vices* while they are in the bud, of encouraging every commendable word and action in its proper season.

In one word;—The Mothers have an opportunity, both by their instruction and example, of fixing such lasting impressions upon their children's minds, as, by the blessing of God upon their endeavours, neither the iniquity of the age, nor the enemy of mankind, shall ever be able to blot out.

If these reasons weigh not with us, we have *matter of fact* to confirm all this. At this day, the children of Jews are always under the Mother's care and instruction, *if living*, till they come to a certain age; during which time, they are taught to read the Law, and so well instructed in its worth, and aim, and meaning, that they are very hardly, if ever, brought over to Christianity, either by the temporal or spiritual advantages which attend it.

One of the deputies at the Synod of Dort informed *that Assembly*, that in his country, (which I think was Pomerania) there was scarce a person, how poor and mean soever his



his condition was, but could read, and give a tolerable account of his faith. This, he said, was owing chiefly to the great care that had been taken to instruct the women, who, when they came to be Mothers, scarce ever failed to instruct their children.

And indeed, so far it is true amongst us: We have few Mothers, who can read, but are very earnest to teach their children. But it is not generally so with the men; they are more abroad,—less thoughtful of their children's spiritual concerns,—impatient of such kind of labour,—and, too often, either put that trouble off to others, or leave it altogether undone. By which means we come to have, in many families, a succession of such ignorant, impious wretches, as are a scandal not only to Christianity but to all civil societies.

And if any body will be at the pains of looking into the families of those that come to untimely ends, they will generally find them the offspring of an ungracious family, in which you may trace up two or three generations of untaught, idle, vicious people.

On the other hand, we have an example in the text, and (God be praised!) we do not want examples amongst ourselves, of virtue and piety, and the fear and blessing of God, continued in families for many generations, by the religious care and concern of parents that have had a Christian education; who, however they may excuse themselves from some other labours which attend the bringing up of their children, if they neglect this, they are inexcusable:—Neither the tenderness of their constitution, nor the care of their families, (much less the pleasures of the world)—neither their quality on one hand, nor their poverty on the other,—will ever free them from the guilt, and infamy, and curse, which will attend those who shall suffer their children to grow up, without principles, and without morality.

I will only mention one other advantage which this way of instruction and education will have towards bettering private families, and consequently the world:—

That the truth, and great design, of the Christian religion has been too much lost in the disputes on one hand, and in the intricate way of teaching them on the other, is too plain to be questioned. Now, by this way, the providence of God seems to provide against the growing evil. They who are educated by these charities are taught all the necessary principles and duties of Christianity, and this after a most plain and orderly way. As they grow up, and improve in knowledge, they will find, that whatever the Holy Scriptures have delivered as necessary to be believed, all that they have been taught

to believe;—that whatever is fit to be done, —commanded by God,—praise-worthy,—or of good report,—all this they have been instructed in as their duty.

The consequence of this will be, they will have no temptation to look out for new teachers;—no disputes with themselves or others, whether this is the right way, in which they find themselves engaged;—but, suiting their manners to their principles, their minds will be easy, and their lives exemplary. And so in all probability will their children after them for many generations; which, in time, may be a means of healing our unhappy divisions,—of making us most serious and concerned for the great duties of Christianity, the honour of God, and the good of mankind.

The only objection to all this is, That wickedness will abound, let what will be done:—What will the good education of a few out of so many do towards these great ends? Some people go further, and wish, and hope, that God will appear in some extraordinary manner, to awaken, to convince, and to convert men.

From wishing this, men of warm heads have often come to attempt it; and there has scarce been any age in which some or other have not appeared with such pretences as these, and with new commissions from God for reforming the world,—never considering, that the Kingdom of God is so often compared by Christ, to corn sown in the earth,—to a grain of mustard-seed set in the ground;—to signify to us, that the Gospel is to be propagated, and piety increased, by the ordinary methods of providence, and by the effectual though silent influences of the Spirit of God;—not by noise, and pomp, and strange appearances, which may amuse, but have never mended the world.

This I am forced to say, to convince those that are engaged in carrying on this good work, that the methods they take for the instruction of children, destitute of help and learning, are most agreeable to the ways of God's appointment, and consequently most likely to promote his glory, and a reformation of manners, so much wished for by all good men.

And why should not we hope for better days even from these small beginnings?

Besides those that are instructed by their pious parents, there are many thousands at this day brought up in the knowledge and ways of God, by the care and charity of others. These will not all forget their God, their benefactors, the principles in which they have been educated, the duties they have been taught, and the sins they have been warned against?

The



The great Lord of the world, who blesteth all our other labours with a constant increase, will, no doubt, bless *this undertaking* with a suitable success. And may you see the work of your hands prosper daily, in a number of religious and grateful persons, bred (*by your charity*) in the fear of God, and brought up to get their bread in an honest and commendable way!

Now, to *countenance*, to *promote*, and to *continue*, this great and good work, is what we aim at, and what I am desired to recommend to your charity at this time. The advantages of forwarding it will be very many;—the number of evil examples will every day be lessened;—a great many families, *knowing and fearing God*, will in his *good time* be established:—A great many of these, remembering the hand that raised them, and the way in which this was done, will be ready to continue *this kind of charity* to future generations. In the mean time,

we shall be no losers by what we give. They that *have children* will entail a blessing upon their own posterity; and they that have *none* are better able to help those who have more than they can well bring up after a Christian manner.

In one word:—It is by the good blessing of God that so many of *us* want nothing that is needful either for our souls or bodies. Whatever we are able to give, cometh of God, and of his own do we give him. Let us then beseech him to pardon all our vain expences;—to make us so careful of his blessings, as that we may always be able to offer some testimony of our gratitude to God for the many favours we have received from him,—to be given where his providence shall direct us to give.

And the good Lord give a blessing to all our charities, and especially to *this*, that it may continue and answer the ends proposed by it!

## S E R M O N LXXX.

A CHARITY SERMON, PREACHED AT ST. DUNSTON'S, FEB. 16, 1723.

CONTINUANCE IN WELL-DOING RECOMMENDED AND ENFORCED.

G A L. vi. 9.

*Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

THESE words suppose two things:—First, *That there is an essential difference betwixt good and evil; between well-doing and evil-doing; which every body is capable of seeing, if it is not plainly their own fault:—And,*

Secondly, *That Christians, through the corruption of nature, and the wiles of Satan and his instruments, are subject to be weary of well-doing; and had need to be often put in mind of their duty in this particular, and guarded against the temptations which may otherwise shake their faith and constancy, and deprive them of their reward.*

These things are *supposed*:—That which is *expressly affirmed* is, *That if Christians, notwithstanding the discouragements they meet with, faint not,—grow not weary of well-doing, they shall certainly receive a reward that will sufficiently recompence their perseverance.*

I. To apply these things to your present improvement, I would first observe to you, that there are several truths so *very plain*, that to go about to prove them would be

to *weaken the faith*, and *puzzle the understanding*, of the hearers, rather than be any real advantage to them; and therefore the Spirit of God, in his Holy Word, is not solicitous to prove such things as every body, endued with reason, is supposed to know. For instance:—Every man is supposed to know *there is a God, who made the world, and all things in it.* Moses therefore begins the Bible with these words, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;” supposing most justly, that he who will not, from the greatness and beauty of the creatures, acknowledge the Maker of them, all the arguments in the world will not convince him. And the Apostle faith expressly, “That all such are without excuse;” let them pretend want of capacity, want of proof, or what else they please.

The difference betwixt *good and evil* is another of those things which require no arguments to make it plainer than it is at first sight. The Apostle tells us, “That the Gentiles, which had not the Law” to direct them particularly what to do, and what to avoid, “had yet the work of the law



"law written in their hearts," and knew very well when they did amiss, and when they did otherwise;—"their conscience witnessing with them." And therefore the Prophet makes no scruple to pronounce a severe woe to all that "call evil good, and good evil."

And they that make it a question, or would make it indifferent, which a man chooses, are either such as are not willing to see the truth, because they will not obey it;—or such as take a pleasure in confounding men's notions, that they may have more partners in their infidelity;—or lastly, such whose consciences are *fear'd*,—who are given up to a *reprobate mind*,—who *seeing, see not*, as our Lord expresses it,—who, being under the conduct of Satan, are by him compelled to do all the mischief that is in their power.

And indeed no other account *can* be given why some men are so indefatigably industrious to set up and promote the kingdom of darkness, by publishing the most blasphemous books;—by confounding the distinction betwixt vice and virtue;—and by undermining the very foundations of the Christian religion. They have rejected the Lord that bought them;—the master they serve will have it so;—they are led captive by him at his will.

But although *good and evil, virtue and vice*, are so easily distinguished, that the "way-faring men, though fools," as the Prophet speaks, "need not err," need not be mistaken; yet, because the *nice bounds* which separate good and evil are not so easily perceived, that a man can say, *Thus far I can go without sin*; this is made a matter of complaint, when in truth it is so ordered for our good,—That we may be obliged to keep at the greatest distance from sin, which we shall certainly do, if we truly *fear* God;—and that we may not content ourselves with the lowest degrees of virtue, which we shall never do, if we sincerely *love* God. *The very best we can do*, considering the talents we have received, the circumstances we are placed in by Providence, the temptations we meet with, and the weakness of our nature;—these things, I say, considered, *the very best we can do is* THE MEASURE OF OUR DUTY.

And therefore God has commanded unlimited holiness;—"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and soul, and strength;"—that as our endeavours *are*, so may our reward be. He has also forbidden every the least degree of sin, that such as truly fear him may not be tempted to come near the borders of it, lest by little and little they fall into destruction.

Now, this plain distinction between good and evil, betwixt well-doing and evil-doing, as it leaves all men whatever without excuse, who act against reason and against conscience, and makes them liable to an account and judgment to come, and consequently to rewards and punishments, as their works shall deserve;—it must sure be one of the greatest acts of piety and charity, to hinder people from ruining themselves eternally; which all most certainly do, who die in their sins unrepented of.

And though God has made it the duty of parents to train up their children in virtue and piety;—though he has appointed an Order of Men, who stand charged for the souls committed to their care;—though he has given us the Holy Scriptures, in which we have the Words of eternal Life, and which are, or may be, in every body's hands;—yet there is still room enough for well-disposed Christians to exercise their charity—by endeavouring to instruct the ignorant, to secure those that are in the way of life, to convert sinners from the error of their ways, and as much as may be, to better the generations to come. As, therefore, there will always be objects of this kind, so, I doubt not, they will never want advocates to plead for them, nor hearts disposed to assist in this good work, notwithstanding the attempts of evil minds to discourage both.

For this is not to be concealed,—that you *will*, and you ought to *expect to meet with discouragements*.

Corrupt nature is apt to be weary of *well-doing*;—wickedness, instead of losing ground, may seem to increase and abound;—many, who have had the benefit of your care and pains, may afterwards have been corrupted by the multitude of evil examples;—some may have abused your charity, and, instead of being humble and thankful for the blessing of a Christian education, may have grown proud, and conceited, and set themselves above those that have helped to raise them. And lastly, there are not wanting instruments of Satan, who have set themselves to *depreciate*, to *ridicule*, to *cry down*, this *excellent charity*.

These are some of the discouragements you meet with: both you that contribute towards this great work, and you that have undertaken the management of it.

But are you therefore to give it up? God forbid! It is your *duty*, and it is your *interest*, to persevere, notwithstanding the difficulties you have to struggle with. It is your *duty*, as it is a *work of well-doing*; and it is your *interest*, as it may, most probably, avert the judgments of God from falling upon us.



It is certainly a *work of well-doing*, notwithstanding the many cavils that have been made against it.

The design is the very same with *that* of the Gospel, "To bring men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

The way of *doing this* is, and *has been*, to take care of such who have either no parents, or none *able* or *capable* of giving them a Christian education. These are taught to read the Scriptures, which are able to make them wise unto salvation. And that they may see with their own eyes, that we teach them nothing but what God has commanded us to teach them,—that they may see the judgments of God upon sinners ever since the world began, and that his promises are sure to the righteous, and to all that fear and serve him in sincerity and truth;—in one word, that they may learn the way that leads to life everlasting, and pursue it with the seriousness of men that are in earnest, and hope to be saved.

And because the corruption of human nature is such, that children are very hardly persuaded to see their interest, or to be at the pains to learn the way that leadeth unto life, there have therefore been proper encouragements thought of, and provided, out of the charitable contributions which from time to time have been collected. Some are *cloathed*;—some are *cloathed and fed*;—all are provided with books, and all are instructed in the principles of the Christian Religion;—and such as are towardly, and answer the end of their education, have a certain prospect of being further taken care of.

Now, if this is not a *work of well-doing*, we must despair of ever proving any thing to be so. And therefore good men ought not to be discouraged, by the objections of wicked men and unbelievers. They will rather take their objections into consideration; and where any corruption or evil consequence has crept into this good design, they will take care to amend and prevent it for the future. For instance:—Such as have the immediate care of instructing them, will make it their great business to be always instilling into them the great duties of *humility* and *gratitude*,—that they may not forget the condition from whence they were taken, nor the Providence that has raised up means of procuring for them a Christian education.

It is but too natural, *it must be confessed*, for children that have been thus educated, and very often for their parents too, because they have had an orderly education, to think them *too good for servile employments*; never

considering, that they must, *very probably*, have continued in the *very lowest rank and condition*, without any distinct knowledge of God, and without any qualifications for a laudable employment, all the days of their life, had not God and good Christians provided better for them.

Now, to make this a pretence for their not being useful in their generation, in *any honest employment whatever*, which the providence of God, or the wisdom of the trustees for these charities shall assign them, is such an *ingratitude*, such a *forgetfulness*, as should by all means be guarded against,—otherwise the consequence *most certainly* will be, that the children of many of those charitable persons who have contributed to *their* better education, must be obliged to accept of those meaner services and offices of life, which they think themselves too good for. And this at last will be a discouragement to this pious work.

And *this*, as was before said, should be the great concern of those to whom their education is intrusted to prevent, as much as may be, *that their hearts may not be lifted up above their condition*; but that they be often put in mind of the condition they would have been in, of *poverty, ignorance, and infidelity*, *it may be*, had not they been delivered by this happy providence;—that pride will very ill become those who have been raised by charity;—that *He* who had all things in his power, made choice of the cross; and though all nature was at his command, yet he was content with a very little, to teach us to be resigned in every condition of life;—and lastly, that he who has more than he deserves (*and who can say he has not?*) has no reason to complain, or think himself overlooked, if he has not the place he aims at.

Let us but guard against *this objection*, and it will not be in the power of *evil men*, or of *evil spirits*, to bring an accusation against you, as if you were not engaged in *well-doing*. And you have no reason to fear their malicious calumnies, nor be concerned at the reproach which bad men would fling upon you, or upon the work you are engaged in.

They that speak against this work do, in effect, say,—That to teach children the fear of God, and the knowledge of their duty, is to make them useless in their generation;—that to teach them to be dutiful to their parents, will make them worse children;—to be true and just in their dealings, will make them worse servants;—to do their duty in that state of life which the providence of God shall assign them, will make them less useful to the world. In short;—that Religion is not consistent with the duties



duties of a civil life; and that, provided the rich can but have the labour and bodies of the poor at their service, it is no matter what becomes of their souls. These are some of the wild reasonings, and consequences of the arguments, of *those* that are enemies to the charity schools. They are too absurd to be confuted seriously.

II. We shall therefore now come to consider that which is expressly affirmed in the text, namely, *That if Christians, notwithstanding the discouragements they meet with, faint not,—grow not weary of well-doing,—they shall certainly reap the fruit of their labour, and receive a reward that shall sufficiently recompence their perseverance.*

The Christian Faith can never be destroyed; that we are sure of: We have God's Word for it, "That the gates of hell shall not prevail against his church," in which the true faith is preserved. But then we are as sure that God will try the faith of particular Christians, and of particular Churches. St. John saith, "That there is an hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth."

The generations before us have had their proper trials. Some have been persecuted for their faith, even unto death; and have thereby secured to themselves a crown of life. Others have fainted, and lost their reward. Even *national Churches* have been so far corrupted in their faith, as to provoke God "to remove their candlestick;" to deprive them of that Light and Gospel, which they perverted, and of the means of grace and salvation, which they despised.

God be praised! it is not so very ill *with us* yet: But, in good truth, we are in the ready way to have our *Faith* corrupted, (as well as our *manners*) if Christians are not a little more concerned *for*, and convinced *of*, the necessity of holding the mystery of Faith in a pure conscience; that is, of believing well, as well as living well.

Pray hear what St. Jude saith to this purpose: [ver. 3, 4.] "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you, that ye should earnestly contend for the Faith which was once delivered unto the Saints."

Here is *the Faith*, that is, a certain number of truths necessary to salvation, delivered to the Saints or Christians, which they were bound to receive, and contend for, as they would hope for salvation. *This Faith* has been delivered down to us. Into *this Faith* we have been baptized. All our hopes of God's favour,—of the pardon of our sins,—of

the divine assistance,—and of everlasting life after death,—all depend upon our heartily embracing *this Faith*, and upon our living as if we did indeed believe what we profess.

And let us assure ourselves, good Christians, that it is not indifferent (as some people are apt to think) *what we believe, provided we live well.* For though a good life be necessary to salvation, yet it must be the effect of a true Faith, without which we must not hope to please God. Our Lord himself told the Jews, "If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." And in another place, "He that believeth not, shall be damned."

Now Christians, they who would not run such hazards, ought to be careful not to suffer themselves to be shaken by every wind of doctrine that is every day stirring, neither to be argued nor laughed out of their Religion and their hopes of Heaven. I say, *laughed out of their Religion*, because there have been people, who would have laid down their lives rather than have denied any one article of the Christian Faith, and yet have not been able to resist the weak attacks of an infidel companion, though his great strength has lain in nothing more than in a bold contempt of God's Word and his Ministers, in making a jest of things sacred, and bantering such as believed them.

To prevent this method and mischief from spreading, and well-meaning Christians from yielding to such devices of Satan, we should well consider,—That there is nothing in true Religion which a Christian need be ashamed of;—that a man may have truth on his side, and yet not be able to answer all the cavils of a subtil adversary;—that the Church has provided for the safety of all her members, having collected all the great truths of the Gospel into her Creeds, which are constantly repeated, that every member of her communion may know what is necessarily to be believed and closely adhered to, and consequently what is false and to be rejected;—that if a Christian has undeniable reasons, that God has revealed any truth or article of Religion, he is bound to receive and believe it, though he should not be able to comprehend every thing relating to it, or be able to answer every question that may be asked concerning it;—that a truth once received upon these grounds, *THIS GOD HAS REVEALED*, every thing contrary to it must be false, let who will affirm it.—Lastly, that *sincere piety* will always be found to be the very best security against the damnable errors of the times. I say, *sincere piety*, such as is found in the way which Christ has appointed for the salvation of sinners; otherwise it may be but

<sup>b</sup> Matth. xvi. 18.    <sup>c</sup> Rev. iii. 10.



but a delusion, and no sure defence against error.

My meaning, and the truth is,—If people will despise or neglect the Ordinances of the Gospel, or are indifferent whether they are in communion with a sound part of the Catholick Church or not;—if they wantonly profane the Lord's Day, and regard not the assemblies of the faithful, where God has promised his presence and graces;—if they hear the Word of God, the Word of Eternal Life, with indifference;—if they pray without reverence and without concern, and without a full purpose of forsaking every evil way;—if they are not careful to keep out of the way of temptation, but wantonly give ear to every sinner, not considering what the Spirit has forewarned them of,—“That evil communications corrupt good manners.” Lastly, if they *have believed*, and yet *are not careful to maintain good works*, they must not think it strange if they fall into errors. God indeed has promised his grace to defend us against the delusions of Satan and his instruments; but then, if we would be sure to know any doctrine whether it be of God, we must be sure sincerely *to desire to do the Will of God*.

The Will of God is,—*That all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth*. The means of salvation He himself has appointed. If we sincerely *seek after, accept of, and close with these*;—if we persevere in the use of *these means*, and in *well-doing*;—we shall certainly receive the end of our faith, even *the salvation of our souls*.

We say, in *well-doing*; for we all know what St. James affirms, that “Faith without works is dead” It is of no more use than a dead man is to the world.

Now, there are an infinite number of GOOD WORKS, useful to men, and acceptable to God. But every man, and every order of men, have some duties, some good works, so peculiarly belonging to their place and circumstances, that all others would be useless, if these should be omitted. For indeed, Christian virtue consists in this: *That every duty have its proper place and concern*. For instance:—

The first duty and great concern of a *Clergyman* is, to take care of the flock committed to his charge;—of a *Parent*, to take care of his children;—of a *Magistrate*, to preserve peace, and to do justice;—of *Servants*, to be faithful to their masters;—of the *Rich*, to take care of the poor;—and of the *Poor*, to be content with their condition.

And if a man should be never so zealous in other instances of *well-doing*, and neglect these relative duties, and such as peculiarly belong to his condition of life, he would

want one of the surest marks of his being under the conduct of the Spirit of God; and of reaping the fruits of his labours, and the reward of a faithful servant.

This Order of Providence, therefore, being *first* regarded; the next thing that a good man will do, will be to consider, *how he may be most useful in his generation?* And having before his eyes the words of the Apostle, immediately going before the text, “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap; he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting;”—he concludes, from these words, that whatever is unnecessarily laid out upon the body, is all entirely lost at death, *when that body sees corruption*. And that whatever can be spared, and is bestowed in promoting the glory of God, and the good of mankind, that this is *laying up a treasure in Heaven*, and that we shall reap the fruits thereof to all eternity. He therefore resolves to look beyond the grave, and to make some provision for a life that is to last so long.

Now if a Christian, *thus* affected, and *thus* resolved, should desire to know how (as Solomon speaks, Prov. xi. 18.) “he may sow in righteousness, so as to reap a sure reward;” one cannot, perhaps, direct him to a better charity than something like this before us,—where the bodies and the souls of the poor are provided for;—where parents receive both relief and comfort in the care that is taken of their children;—where so many children are taught to *know*, and to *fear* God.

By which charity many thousands *have been*, and many thousands are *like to be*, rescued from extreme poverty, and the consequences of it,—which are, too often, *want of instruction, gross ignorance, great temptations to vice, and a proneness to run into it*.

By which charity the number of evil examples will every day be lessened;—a great many families, *knowing and fearing God*, will (in his good time) be established; a great many of these, in all probability, gratefully remembering the method and way by which they were raised, will hereafter contribute towards continuing this way of *well-doing* to future generations.

In the mean time, neither they that are the *managers*, nor they that *contribute* towards this good work, will have any reason to despond. It is seed sown; and it will have its increase most certainly. We see it so in the common course of husbandry:—When the corn is sown, it is left to the ordinary providence and blessing of God, who gives an increase according to the goodness



of the ground, and the means made use of to improve it.

Now, the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to seed sown in the ground, to give Christians an idea, and an assurance, that their *spiritual labours*, their endeavours for the good of their souls, will as certainly be recompensed as their temporal labours for the support of their bodies.

They shall see the *fruit*, and they shall receive the *reward*, of their labours. They will see those, whom they have plucked as fire-brands out of the fire, giving God eternal praises for his goodness in making *them* the instruments of their conversion and salvation. And they will find the Lord of Heaven and Earth, who needs none of our services, yet condescending to accept our poor endeavours, and to reward them beyond our utmost wishes. Sufficient, one would hope, to make us bear with patience

all the discouragements we can possibly meet with!

Happy will it be for us, if the frequent occasions of this kind we meet with shall make us more careful so to husband the talents wherewith we are intrusted, as that we may always have whereof to offer a testimony of our gratitude to our great Benefactor.

And the good Lord accept of and give a blessing to all our charities, and grant that they may obtain for us *this comfort*, that so much as we have given to God, and to these good purposes, so much treasure we have laid up in Heaven.

For which place, may the good God *prepare* and *bring* us all, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

## S E R M O N LXXXI.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

The Ordinances of God attended with certain, though invisible Effects.

J O H N iii. 7, 8.

*Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The Wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: So is every one that is born of the Spirit.\**

THE occasion of these words was this:— Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, considering the wonders which Jesus Christ did, concluded, that he was certainly a *Teacher come from God*; he was therefore desirous to know of Jesus, whether God designed to make known to his people by *Him* more than he had revealed to them by Moses and the Prophets?

Jesus answered him, “That which I am come to teach you is *this*;—That whoever hopes for happiness in the life to come, *must be born again, or from above.*”

Nicodemus not understanding this way of speaking, *though he was a master of Israel*, and wondering how a man could be born again, our Lord proceeds to tell him, ver. 6. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is *spirit.*” That which you call life, and which you received from your parents, is but a *mortal life*, which subjects you to sin and to death. Your parents were sinners, and so

are you, and such will your children be after you;—you have lost the *image* of God, in which you were created, and nothing *on earth* can restore you to *that*, and to God's favour.

I do therefore (saith our Lord) solemnly assure you, “that except a person be born of Water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God;” that is, Unless he be *baptised*, and by that means made a member of Christ's church, a child of God, and an heir of the Kingdom of Heaven, he cannot partake of that Spirit, from above, which is absolutely necessary to change our nature, to make us *new creatures*, and to fit us for heaven and happiness everlasting.

Nicodemus not understanding how such a ceremony as baptism should be a means of obtaining that Spirit; or how the Spirit, *which we cannot see*, should be able to work such a mighty change; our Lord proceeds to convince him, by a familiar instance, that such a thing is not impossible, nor unlikely:

\* See 1 Pet. i. 23. 1 John i. 13.



"The wind," saith he, "bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth;" that is, Though the wind be invisible, yet we find the effects of it very plainly, and in a thousand ways. In like manner, though the Spirit of God be not seen by men, yet he produces very strange effects in those to whom he is communicated. He enables them to subdue their corruptions;—he enlightens their understandings;—he changes their hearts;—he gives them new thoughts, new desires, new affections;—in short, if they do not drive him from them, he will make them *New Creatures*, and fit for that happiness which God designed at first to bestow upon them.

Now from all this it appears, that if we continue in the state in which we were born, we are certainly undone; "For that which is born of the flesh, is flesh." That we can only be restored by the Spirit of God: "By grace, ye are saved." That *Baptism* is indeed the ordinary means of salvation; but that baptism does not save us, as it is the putting away the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience, bearing witness that we have the Spirit of God. In short; that nothing but becoming *new creatures* can fit us for Heaven; and that nothing but the Spirit of God, communicated to us in his Holy Ordinances, can make this *new creation*.

Now, though these things are as plain from the Holy Scriptures as truths can be, yet it is as sure they are too often *overlooked, neglected, or despised*, by people of *careless or profane* minds, who will believe nothing but what they can see with their eyes, or what is agreeable to their own corrupt taste of things;—who will (with Nicodemus) not only say, *How can these things be?* but despise those whose duty it is to press the consideration of them upon their hearers.

It is for this reason, good Christians, that I have made choice of these words of Christ, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit."—I have made choice of these words, in order to establish you in the truth, and to convince you, that the Ordinances of God are attended with as certain effects as any thing in nature; and that the fruits of the Spirit, in all faithful Christians, may as plainly be perceived as the wind when it blows, or the sun when it shines.

It is true, *we are to live by Faith, and not by sight*; we are to make use of the means of grace which God has ordained, and we are to trust his Word and Promise, that he

will bestow the graces which he has assured us *shall* attend his ordinances;—but then, though the grace be invisible, the fruits thereof are easily discerned.

Thus we are "baptised for the remission of sins."<sup>a</sup> *Here is an outward visible sign of an inward and invisible grace.* But then this grace becomes *visible* in the lives of all such as are truly *regenerate*. It is easily seen who *have*, and who have *not*, retained the Spirit of God communicated unto them in baptism. The children of God, and the children of the Devil, are as manifest as light is from darkness. "He that doeth righteousness is of God," saith St. John; "and he that doeth not righteousness is not of God."

And here, good Christians, take notice, once for all, of what the Word of God, as well as sad experience, assures us,—That we are born in sin;—that we are by nature liable to the wrath of God;—that of ourselves we are not able to think one good thought, much less are we able to help ourselves out of this sad condition.

But then, God of his infinite mercy has delivered us out of this sad estate. We are reconciled unto God by the death of his Son, who, that he may fit us for heaven and happiness, hath appointed several Ordinances, in the due use of which we may certainly expect the assistance of his Spirit, to renew our nature, and to restore us to the image of God, from which we are sadly fallen.

And though these Ordinances, and the instruments he makes use of, have no manner of virtue in themselves, to renew and to restore us to the favour of God; and though the power that accompanies them be as invisible as the wind; yet the effect and blessing that attends the due use of them is as certain as that God is true.

Thus, for instance, he has appointed certain Persons, men of like infirmities with yourselves, to be his Ministers or Stewards. To them he has committed *the Word of Reconciliation*, and the several Ordinances which he has appointed to make it effectual.

By virtue of this commission, they *baptise* your children, by which they are made members of Christ's church, children of God, and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

By virtue of the same commission, they endeavour to fit them for *Confirmation*, that they may thereby receive the Holy Spirit, by which they are sealed unto the day of redemption, and are enabled to pass through a corrupt world, and to escape from their most powerful enemies.

<sup>a</sup> Acts ii. 38.

<sup>e</sup> 1 John iii.



And lastly, because by reason of the frailty of our nature we are but too apt to fall, by virtue of this commission, these Ministers of Christ restore you again by a Godly discipline, absolving those that are truly penitent, and sealing their pardon by administering unto them the body and blood of Christ, by which alone we obtain remission of our sins.

Well now;—Will you, because these Ministers of God are men like yourselves, will you despise their ministry, and the favours offered you by their hands; and refuse to be reconciled unto God by their means? Or will you despise the Ordinances of God, because the graces that attend them are invisible? Will you, because some profane person may say, *What signifies a little water?* will you therefore refuse to baptise your children? Or because another, as ignorant and profane, shall ask you, *What will you be the better for the Bishop's blessing, and the laying his hands upon you?* Will you therefore despise Confirmation, though it is an Ordinance of the Church?

To proceed:—Because Bread and Wine are common things, and every body can take, and eat, and drink of them,—Will you therefore despise these creatures, when they are consecrated in the Lord's Supper by his Ministers appointed thereunto?

It is true, the graces that accompany all these Holy Ordinances are not visible, no more is God that bestows them; and yet we believe *him* to be; and have not we *his* Word and Ordinance for the truth of these things?

And are there not many holy persons, (the Lord increase their number!) who, by the use of these Ordinances, being rescued out of the power and snare of the devil, do very sensibly perceive the work of the Spirit of God in their hearts, and the fruits of it in their *lives*. And, on the other hand, are there not men *given up to a reprobate mind*, who are incapable of advice, and *commit all iniquity with greediness*?

Do but consider the reason of this. They are as much in their senses as other men. They have heard it over and over again, that eternal misery is like to be their portion; and yet they go on without fear, and without concern. And the reason is, They have grieved the good Spirit of God, by which they had been sealed unto the day of redemption; the Spirit of the Lord has forsaken them, and an evil spirit has taken possession of them; and though they can see neither the one nor the other, yet the effects are plain: "The tree is known by its fruits;" and by the life any man leads, it is easily seen what spirit governs him.

I have used all these arguments to secure you from a spirit of error and wickedness too frequent in the world, which would persuade men to believe nothing but what they see with their eyes;—who, because they have driven the Spirit of God from them, and no longer feel his power in themselves, do therefore deride it in all others;—who despise public ordinances, and would bring us back into the state of Heathens who know not God.

But ye, good Christians, have been taught better things. Your Saviour tells you, "That ye must be born again," or else you can neither be *holy* here, nor *happy* hereafter. Man by nature being *born* in sin, and utterly incapable of reforming himself without the *Divine assistance*.

And this is what I design to explain to you, that you may acknowledge the grace of God, and be careful not to grieve that *Holy Spirit by which you are sanctified*.

I. And in the first place, take notice, *That the great design of the Christian Religion is, to recover man from the state of corruption, into which he is fallen, to a state of perfection, and to secure him in it, until God thinks fit to call him out of this world to a much better.*

Now, *This cannot be done BUT BY THE SPIRIT OF GOD*. Neither the Law of Moses, nor the Law of Nature; no, not the State of Innocence, was sufficient to direct and secure man from falling, without an especial grace of God.

The Jews had a law both holy, just, and good, and yet they became a most wicked people. The Gentiles had all the advantages of reason and learning, and yet they fell into the most monstrous sins.

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, is forced to put both Jews and Gentiles in mind of this, that he might more effectually recommend the grace of God afforded in the Gospel to all true believers.

And indeed Jesus Christ did not come into the world, till the fullness of time; that is, until the whole world *were*, or *might have been* convinced, that there was need of further help to save them from ruin, and to make them perfect, besides their own free will, their reason, or learning, or the best law that could be given them. And this must be the work of the Holy Ghost alone.

For this end we are dedicated to the Holy Ghost in *Baptism*, that he may take us under his especial care;—that he may enlighten our *understandings* with saving knowledge;—that he may subdue our *wills* to the will of God;—and that he may change our *affec-*



sions, from following after vanity, to love those things which are above;—that being made *partakers of a divine nature*, God may own us for his children, and, when we die, give us an inheritance with the Saints in glory.

In short; this is the great rule of the Gospel: “Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.” “They that are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God,” being sanctified by the Holy Ghost. To *them*, and to *them only*, belongs the inheritance.

And this is the reason that I would persuade you all, good Christians, not to deceive yourselves, or to place *the new birth* we are speaking of in any thing but in a *new life*. This is what all the ordinances of God aim at.

We are therefore baptised, that, being within the covenant of grace, we may have the assistance of God's Spirit to enable us to become new creatures: And if we value baptism upon any other account, we mistake the end of that ordinance.

II. *Confirmation* is an holy usage, received from the Apostles; and very wrong it would be to neglect it. But then those that come not to be *confirmed*, with full purposes, by the assistance of the Holy Ghost, of keeping the vows that they take upon them, are in as ill an estate as if they had never been confirmed.

III. We look upon *Prayer* as a most necessary duty, and so indeed it is. But then a Christian would be sadly mistaken, if he should conclude himself to be a New Creature, and in the favour of God, purely because he *prays*, unless he finds the fruits of his prayers in being better able to subdue his corrupt affections by the Spirit of God, which God vouchsafes to all that pray to him in sincerity.

IV. *Hearing the Word of God* is a necessary duty;—nobody denies it. But if a Christian, when he has heard the manner of his redemption, the sins he is to avoid, and the duties he is to practise, if he grows no better, if the work of holiness does not go forward, it is a sure sign he mistakes the very end of hearing.

V. The *Lord's Supper* is truly esteemed one of the most solemn Ordinances of the Christian religion, and a testimony of our being in communion with Christ and with his church. But now, if a Christian, in unity with the Christian church, does not live as becomes a member of Christ, he condemns himself, and *eats and drinks* his own destruction.

In one word; Christians should be very careful not to place holiness in actions which do not make us one jot the better. A wicked unregenerate man can do all these things, *as to outward appearance*, as well as the most holy.

Let me therefore just set before you *the true marks of holiness*, that you may always remember in what it consists.

It consists then in such a change of the heart, as that a man desires and strives to please God, out of a sense of love and duty to him. So saith St. John: *Who so keepeth his Word, in him verily is the love of God perfected.*

And though, through the weakness of our nature, our obedience may not be perfect, yet it may be sincere; and so it must be, or it will never be accepted: That is, We must hate all sin, strive against it, avoid all temptations to it;—we must live in the fear of God, beg his pardon when we have done amiss, pray earnestly for the assistance of his Holy Spirit, and be always striving to get the mastery over our corruptions; and God, who sees our sincerity, will pardon our imperfections, and increase our graces daily.

To conclude:—By this action of your's, you secure to yourselves the protection of God, under which you may be secure from fear of evil.

But then take this along with you, that it will require *care*, and *pains*, and *self-denial*, and *prayers*, to secure the favour of God, and the continuance of his grace. But then you will not think these so very hard conditions, if you consider the joys that are set before you, even an *eternal happiness*.

And if the difficulties of an holy life fright you,—if the commands of Jesus Christ seem hard to flesh and blood,—do but consider, *who can dwell with everlasting burnings?* And it is to be hoped, you will change your mind, and be at any pains to escape so frightful a judgment.

It concerns you to know it, and it is our duty to tell you,—that it is much easier *now* to begin to lead a Christian life, than it will be hereafter, when *evil habits* are become a second nature, when *evil company* shall have corrupted your manners, when *evil discourse* shall have corrupted your principles.

It was for this reason the Spirit of God has left this advice upon record, REMEMBER THY CREATOR IN THE DAYS OF THY YOUTH; that is, before sin and hell get the dominion over you.

It will therefore be your *interest*, as it is your *duty*, from this day forward, to be very

<sup>f</sup> Heb. xii. 14.

<sup>g</sup> 1 John ii. 3.



careful of your ways, to take all opportunities of learning your duty, to pray daily to God for the continuance of his grace, and to give him thanks for the favours you enjoy.

But if, instead of doing this, you presently forget the vows that you have taken upon you, and fall into any scandalous sins, or into a careless way of living, then this whole congregation will be witnesses against you, that you lied unto God, when you promised to lead a sober and a Christian life.

But we will hope better things of you, and that you will from this time become a comfort to your friends, and to those that have taken pains to instruct you;—a credit to the religion you profess, and an honour to God.

And now, take notice, that you have been faithfully instructed in the nature of the Covenant of Baptism, which you have now renewed, and you can never be too thank-

ful to those that have taken pains to fit you for this Holy Ordinance. You have been plainly told of the danger you are liable to,—of the enemies you have to deal with,—of the difficulties of an holy life,—of the necessity of God's grace, and of using the means to attain it. All that we can do farther for you is, to offer up our prayers to God for you, that you may for the remainder of your lives live worthy of your Christian profession; and that knowing that you are the servants of the living God, you may walk as in his sight, avoid all such things as are contrary to your profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same.

And may God, who has made you his children by adoption, bring you in his good time to his everlasting Kingdom, for Jesus Christ's sake, the Son of his love! To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, thanksgiving, and praise, now and for ever.

## S E R M O N LXXXII.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE DANGER OF LIVING, LIKE CHILDREN, AT ALL ADVENTURES, WITHOUT THOUGHT, OR REASON, OR FEAR, OR STEADINESS.

I C O R. xiii. II.

*When I was a Child, I spake as a Child, I understood as a Child, I thought as a Child: But when I became a Man, I put away childish things.*

THE Apostle's design in these words is to shew the great difference there will be betwixt our knowledge in *this life* and in *the life to come*,—Even as great as betwixt the weak and foolish thoughts of *children*, and the sober reasonings of *men*.

He supposeth, that if men are not very much wanting to themselves, they will *think*, and *live*, and *reason*, and *speak*, at another rate than they did when they were Children.

And so they certainly *will*, if they have made use of that reason, and those opportunities of improving their understanding, which God has afforded them in his Holy Word. But they do not always do so.

Hence it comes to pass, that the greatest part of men spend their *thoughts* and *time* about things as little to the purpose as the merest children. People will hardly believe this. It is necessary, therefore, that they should be convinced of it, and see the danger of living like children, at all adven-

tures, without *thought*, or *reason*, or *fear*, or *sense*.

If children have no *fore-sight*;—if they have no *serious aim*, or *design*, in any thing they do;—if they *fear no evil*;—if they are apt to be *tossed to and fro*, and know not what to believe or do;—why, *this is their character*, we look for no better from them.

And if we blame them for being *ignorant*, *foolish* in their choices, *careless* of their ways, it is to cure them of their faults, lest these vices should grow up with them, and when *for the time* they should be men in understanding, they should continue to have the *folly*, the *weakness*, the *ignorance of children*.

Now, whatever we think of ourselves, this is the case of an infinite number of people, who grow older without being wiser to any good purposes. And who, when they leave the world, have “no sign of *virtue to shew*.”<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Widd. v. 13.



We should be convinced of this, if we had but the patience to compare *our thoughts, and words, and actions*, with the designs and manners of children, whom we despise for their weaknesses, and correct for their follies.

Now, though such a comparison may be very uneasy, yet, since it may put us upon considering whether we are as wise as *men* should be, I will choose this *very plain way of instruction*.

I. And *first*,—This is the character of children, *to be very ignorant*; or, as God is pleased to express it, *not to know their right hand from their left*.<sup>1</sup> We hope that *time and age* will cure this; and we are often at a great deal of pains and expence to improve their understandings; and we are well satisfied when we see that they know the world, and are like to live in it. But neither we, nor they, consider what a sad thing it is *to know the world*, without knowing its *snarcs, and temptations, and dangers*, and how to avoid them. And yet this is what men seldom teach their children,—seldom learn themselves. And what is the consequence of this? Why, generally speaking, both *old and young* live in a dark ignorance of what concerns another world. And though they are well acquainted with the names of *Religion, of Christianity, of God* that made them, of *Heaven* the portion of his faithful servants, and of *Hell* the just reward of the wicked; yet they consider no more how people ought to live, who have heard of these things, than their very children, who only know them by rote.

Now; this is a truth which can never be sufficiently lamented,—That when people come to years, they do not seriously endeavour to possess their hearts and minds with saving knowledge, and a just concern for their souls. For what will all other knowledge profit a man who does not know how to escape the temptations of a wicked world, how to please God, and how he may save his soul from eternal death?

There may be some excuse, if, while they are children, they do not know these things. But to let this ignorance grow up with us, and when we are *men*, and capable of understanding the things we have been taught, and that our everlasting interest lies at stake, we are plainly without excuse, not to consider things of so great concern to us.

II. Another character of children is, *That they have no apprehensions of future evils*. The present is what most affects them, and it is often to no purpose that you speak to them of *spiritual enemies*, of the anger of God, and of the terrors of the world to come. And the misery is, this *fearless tem-*

*per* grows up with them, and they learn to live in a *careless security* all their days.

And what can we say to awaken them? Shall we often repeat what the Holy Scriptures tell us of such as live without God in the world? Shall we assure them, that all the judgments mentioned in the Bible, and executed upon ungodly men, are but faint representations of the worm that never dies, and the *fire* that never shall be quenched?

Alas! this is what they have often heard, and what they profess to know, and believe; but indeed they do neither. For who can be *fearless and unconcerned* at the thoughts of eternal death, though at some distance? *None but children, who cannot consider; and fools, who make a mock of sin.*

III. Another character of children is, *to live without any aim, or end of their actions*. We blame them for this, We ask them what they propose to themselves? We assure them, that if they once get an evil habit of living at random, and without design, they will be unsettled all their life long, and miserable at the last. We desire they would consider, that they did not come into the world only to eat, and drink, and sleep, and take their pleasure;—that this is merely the *life of a beast*;—and that since God has given them an understanding soul, he expects they should make use of their reason in proposing to themselves an *end worthy of their creation*.

By such arguments as these, we endeavour to *fix their minds*, that they may *think* and apply themselves to something, and *be of some use in their generation*.

Well then; will *unthoughtfulness* ruin our children, and will it not hurt ourselves? Shall we blame them for not *thinking* why they live, or what will become of them. And shall we never blame ourselves, when we know in our consciences, that we have never seriously thought of *this short question*,—*What was I made for?*

Why, you will say, do not all Christians know, *that the salvation of their souls* is what they were sent into the world for? Do not all Christians propose *that* to themselves, and doubt not but at last they shall be happy? Yes; just as children do, without ever considering in good earnest, what is the happiness they hope for,—how it is to be obtained,—what God expects of such as shall be admitted into Heaven,—and what will certainly hinder men from ever going thither.

In short; we hope for happiness in general, without saying to ourselves,—As I hope for happiness, I must *first seek the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness*; that is, I must, *before all things*, study to *know* what the Christian religion proposes to us,—what it requires

<sup>1</sup> Jonah iv. 11.



requires of us,—what is the *will* of God, and how we may *do his will*. Without this, we shall still be like *children*, trying one thing after another, looking and hoping for happiness and satisfaction every where, and always meeting with *disappointments*: Because we do not seriously say, *This* is the happiness I was made for,—*this* I must think of,—*this* I must labour for, whatever else I lose or neglect.

And we think and speak like *men*, when we make *this* our great aim; and resolve, that by the grace of God, neither *business*, nor *pleasures*, nor any other thing, shall divert us from *working out our salvation* with a concern becoming so great a prize.

And though a Christian must live in the world, and must take care of himself, and of those that depend upon him, yet still he remembers, that *this is not the world he was made for*;—that *he is hastening to another world*, which therefore he strives to keep his eye upon, lest the *hurry* or the *pleasures* of this world should divert him from thinking upon God, who is the fountain of eternal blessedness, and loving him with all the powers of his soul.

He considers, that let his circumstances *here* be what they will, he must take thought for *hereafter*, or be undone for ever;—that if his condition be never so hard, he may, in God's good time, see an end of his sorrows;—and if he has never so many enjoyments, he must leave them all in a very short time;—that therefore it will be no sense to make *that* one's aim, and choice, and delight, which we *know* can never make us happy, which has deceived us a thousand times, and which we should utterly despise, if we did but once truly consider the happiness God proposes to us.

And why should we not consider it? We have very many reasons to do so, if either the truth of God, the greatness of the reward, or the disappointments of this life, have any weight with us.

To conclude, therefore, this particular:—We are not surprised when we see a *child* fond of some gaudy thing, which in truth is worth very little, and only pleaseth the senses. But then, are there not *men* as weak? Are there not *men* who, as Job expresses it, “Say unto gold, thou art my hope; saying unto the fine gold, thou art my confidence;” that is, whose hearts are entirely set upon their riches, which, after all, are of no *real value*? Are there not people who are so extremely fond of pleasures, that they will not *deny* themselves let what will follow? And can any thing be more childish, than to make *that* their own main end, which all people are agreed in would be the ruin of their children?

IV. Lastly; there is another *weakness* for which we justly blame and correct our *children*, and that is, *They are unstable in all their ways*. The Apostle takes notice of this character of children,<sup>1</sup> and tells us how ill it would become *men* to be, like *them*, tossed to and fro by every temptation.

And indeed we easily see in *children* the mischief of being giddy and uncertain. We see plainly what it will end in; and that if this *unsteadiness of temper* be indulged, they will be in danger of wasting their whole life in purposes and designs which will end in nothing except their ruin.

Now; if this be the character of very many, *even when they come to be men*, it will serve at least to convince us of our weakness and folly, and to leave us inexcusable, if we do not amend.

And that *this* is so, we need but look every man into his own life, and we shall find a strange *fickleness* and *uncertainty* even in those things which we *own* to be of the greatest concern to us. For instance:—

How often have we proposed to begin a new life, when all has come to nothing! How often have we forgot the *mercies* we have received, the *fears* we have been under, the *promises* we have made of better obedience, and after all have returned again to our iniquities! Can there be any *weakness* in children more blameable than *this*; or any fault in *men* more necessary to be mended?

And now, to what end have we been making *this comparison*, and endeavouring to shew that the generality of *men* have all the *ignorance*, *weakness*, and *inconstancy*, of *children*? Is it not, that we may perceive our own blindness? That we may open our eyes, and see, before it be too late, the danger of *living without God in the world*? In one word; that we may act like *men*, who have reason given them, and an opportunity of working out their own salvation, if they are not wanting to themselves.

What, therefore, I have further to say upon this subject shall be upon *this head*; namely, *That whatever favour God may shew to the ignorance and mistakes of children, he requires of men that they do in good earnest take care of their own souls*. That therefore Christians must not think of being saved, *without knowing the will of God*, and *without great care to do what they know will please him*.

Now, when I say that Christians should know *the Will of God*, I mean that they should not only learn the principles of Christianity, which most people think it enough to do, but that they should understand the *manner of their Redemption*; which will require *some pains*, and *thoughts* of

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 14.



heart, before a man shall be thoroughly convinced of the necessity of an holy life, and of obtaining the grace of God which is necessary to lead such a life.

It is necessary, for example, that a man should know, and that too from his own heart and experience, *the sad condition a sinner is in, without the help of a Redeemer.* It is plainly for want of knowing this as *they should do*, that Christians are so little concerned to make their peace with God. For if they did really know, That they are by nature *enemies to God*; that if they are not received into favour, they are undone for ever; that God will not receive them into favour but upon their *true repentance*; that *true repentance* is a very difficult work; that without a lively faith in Jesus Christ, all our endeavours after happiness will be to no manner of purpose; that *such a faith* is not to be obtained without *earnest prayers*, a *great humility*, and denying one's self a great many things for which we have naturally a very earnest desire:—If these things were but considered, Religion would appear to be a *very serious business*, and people would not, *like children*, hope to go to Heaven without any thought or pains. They would not think it sufficient to have learned a few precepts when they were young; to go now and then to God's House; to abstain from some great and vile sins, which make a man abominable in the very eye of the world.

Christianity is quite another thing. *It is that which is to restore us to the favour of God, whom sin has made our enemy.* And this it does, by *changing us entirely* from what we are by nature. So that a man may be sure he must not go to Heaven, if *such a change* is not wrought in him before he dies. If *this* will not make us serious, and concerned to know our duty, nothing will do it.

But even *this* is not sufficient. It was for this reason, that I desired you to observe *another fault* in children, and which is apt to grow up with them; and that is, *to live without any serious design or end of their actions.*

Whatever becomes of *children*, a man is sure to be ruined that does so. For how is it possible for a man to please God, or perform the duties which Christianity obliges him to, who does not make this *the design of his life*? For *this* will be the fruit of living without a daily concern and aim after happiness:—A man will be apt to set his heart upon the world, and the things that are about him; which will lead him insensibly to forget God: (and indeed, when men *will not retain God in their knowledge*, God will give them up to a *mind void of judgment*, to *work all iniquity with greediness*, to the ruin both of their souls and bodies.) On the

other hand, whoever has *the seriousness of a man*, and has most at heart how he may save his soul; such a person will be jealous of every thing which may lead him from God;—he will be careful of his ways, will observe all his failings, will avoid all occasions of evil; and, above *all things*, he will be most earnest in his prayers to God to give him the graces that are most necessary to enable him to persevere in the ways of holiness unto *his life's end*.

For there is another *evil habit* which we learn when we are young, and which we very hardly forsake when we should be wiser; and that is, *an unconstant temper.*

There are few people who have not at some times *very serious thoughts*. God will shew men to *themselves*, and make them *thoughtful*, whether they *will* or *not*. But then here is our *fault*:—We grow weary of ourselves, and strive to divert our minds from thinking of our own misery, till at last we forget that we *are* miserable, or in any danger.

If, in some of these *serious moods*, we make vows of better obedience, we are apt to *forget* them, and all our good purposes come to nothing; and, what is seriously to be lamented, there are very many who have gone into eternity without coming to any *lasting* resolution of serving God, though they had attempted it all their life long, going forwards and backwards till *the Night came*, when there was no more time to work.

Our Lord has given us sufficient warning of the mischief that will follow, if, after we have been called to repentance, and have obeyed the voice of God, we again grow careless, and return to our sins. He tells us for instance, that “the evil spirit re- turns with seven other spirits worse than himself; so that the last state of such a man is worse than the first.” It is this which makes *fear* and *watchfulness* so necessary Christian duties, since, if a man is not always upon his guard, the evil spirit will get admittance, and then you see what dreadful work he makes.

After all;—People may be convinced, and ashamed of their *weaknesses* and *inconstancy*, and lament, to no purpose, that they are too like children, when they should be men in understanding, and have their senses exercised to know *good* and *evil*. The way to prevent these mischiefs would be,

*First*; For parents to give their children a *Christian Education*, according to their power.

Here is the beginning of all our future misery. Children are *indulged*; they are suffered to have their own wills, to make their



their own choices, which are always foolish. This helps to strengthen their corruption, which will make their hearts to ake before ever they can master it. Whereas, if they were brought up *in the fear of God*, which is the beginning of wisdom;—if they were made sensible betimes, what they were sent into the world for, what they ought most to fear, and what to hope for, above all earthly blessings;—if they were taught the way of God's commandments, and discreetly corrected when they should forget their duty;—this would preserve their minds from the corruptions of an evil world. Whereas those that are accustomed to evil, and have the seeds of wickedness cherished in their hearts, will meet with the greatest difficulties in overcoming their evil habits.

Now, this being very often the case, there is no way left, but,

*Secondly*,—*To fly to God for help*, and beg his most gracious assistance to break these double bonds;—to put his fear into our hearts;—to awaken in us a lively sense of our eternal ruin;—to draw us by the chords of love,—that our faith, and fear, and love, may make us choose the way of God's commandments, and keep us steadfast in them, till, by perseverance in well-doing, we have made our calling and election sure.

Let us consider, that we are now *no longer children*;—that it is now our duty to live like men, who know, or ought to know, the danger of living in a stupid neglect of eternity.

If children are led by ill examples to think of nothing but their present satisfaction, it is because they are no better taught, and know no better; but this will not excuse them when they come to be men. It will not then be enough to say, I do as the rest of the world does. This will not satisfy an awakened conscience, which will tell us, that God has expressly commanded us *not to be conformed to this present evil world*.

To conclude:—All Christians agree in this, that *some time in our lives we must resolve in good earnest to put away childish*

*things*, and to live like men who have their senses about them. Amongst these, very many put off their conversion so long, till death overtakes them unawares. Some contract such evil habits, as makes them plainly despair of ever overcoming them. Others live in a way of *repenting and sinning* all the days of their life.

To prevent all these mischiefs as much as may be, the Church has appointed a time when all people shall be called upon to consider, to resolve, and to promise, to live as becomes men, as becomes Christians, as becomes those that hope for salvation. The time the church has appointed is, when children are come to years of discretion.

And this she has done for a very good reason; namely, that people may, with their own choice and consent, dedicate themselves to God, before sin and hell have got the dominion over them,—before evil habits are become a second nature.

And a sad account are those parents like to make, who neglect such a time of preparing their children to receive the grace of God, then offered them after so *seasonable and solemn* a manner. They do not consider, that the wisest of men, without the grace of God, are too weak for so great a work as all Christians are to go through.

What then do they think will become of their children, whom they abandon to the malice of the devil, who, like a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may (be permitted to) devour, finding them out of God's ways and protection.

Let all others put their trust in God, whose grace is sufficient to enable us to do whatever he expects from us. This he has shewn in the conversion of others whom he has effectually called from an evil life to a life of true religion, in spite of all their enemies, and the great corruption of their nature.

God grant that we may never resist his grace, nor grieve his Holy Spirit, by which we are sanctified. To whom, &c.



## S E R M O N LXXXIII.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE KNOWLEDGE NECESSARY FOR EVERY ONE WHO TAKES UPON HIMSELF  
THE PROFESSION OF A CHRISTIAN, POINTED OUT AND ILLUSTRATED.

LUKE xiv. 28, 29, 30.

*For which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.*

OUR Blessed Saviour well foresaw, that when the Gospel came to be preached to the world, when men were told that their becoming members of the Church of Christ gave them a title to the protection and love of God, a right to Heaven and eternal happiness,—many would desire to become Christians.

Now, that they might not be deceived in their hopes;—that they might not undertake a profession in hopes of being great gainers by it, and afterwards forsake it because of the difficulties they might probably meet with;—he makes use of this parable, to make men sensible how wisely they go about their worldly concerns:—That they may not be discouraged or disappointed, they sit down, and consider with themselves, —they consult with others wiser than themselves,—they think what difficulties they shall meet with,—what it will cost them, to compass their ends. From whence he would have us make this conclusion; That for the very same reason, when people desire to become Christians in hopes of salvation, they ought in the first place to know what will be expected from them, and whether they will resolve to do what is expected from them.

If a man has a house to build, before he lays one stone, he considers what the charge may be, whether he is able, and whether he is resolved, to lay out so much upon it. And he that would be a disciple of Christ, if he does not resolve before-hand to do what Christ expects from his faithful servants, will not only become a scandal to his profession, but will certainly come short of what he hopes for by being a Christian.

Therefore, to carry on the design of this parable:—As a man, who is about to undertake any work of moment, would be glad to be informed what difficulties he is likely

to meet with,—what will be necessary to bring his work to perfection,—how much he will be a loser if he miscarries;—it is as necessary that every person, who takes upon himself the profession of a Christian, should before-hand know,

*First*; What God will expect from him.

*Secondly*; What discouragements he will certainly meet with.

*Thirdly*; What assistances he may depend upon.

*Lastly*; What means he must use to gain the end of his Faith, which is, the salvation of his soul.

And these are the particulars which, by the good grace of God, I now purpose to explain to you.

I. And, in the first place, every person who desires to be a Christian, that he may live and die in the favour of God, will desire to know *what he must do to please God.*

We all know, that *we must renounce the Devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh;—that we must believe in God, and keep his commandments.*

But it is not enough to know, and to say this, unless you resolve to live like people that really believe this to be their duty and their interest. Whoever hopes to go to Heaven when he dies, must be in earnest while he lives to fit himself for it.

This is signified in the text, *by sitting down and counting the cost*; intimating thus much, That if I think I ought to be a Christian, I ought likewise seriously, and often, to think what it is to be one; I ought often to consider the promises which God hath made to such as fear and serve him to the best of their power, that my heart being full of the sense of my own unworthiness, and



and God's goodness, I may very cheerfully and thankfully do whatever I shall at any time be convinced will please him.

Now, he that is thus disposed, and resolved that for the sake of Heaven, which he hopes for, and for the love of God who has provided such good things for them that serve him;—he that is resolved at all times, for these reasons, to do what he shall be persuaded will please God, is in a fair way to happiness, let his understanding be never so mean.

And this I affirm to you, and this I will shew you from God's Word, that none of you may think, either that want of learning will excuse you from keeping the commandments of God, or hinder you from attaining the promises he has made his children and servants. "If any man (saith Christ)\* will "do his will," that is, really desires to please God, "he shall know of the doctrine "whether it be of God, or whether I speak "of myself:" that is, The Spirit of God is always ready to enlighten the minds, and to inform the judgments of those that seriously desire to please him. Thus it was with St. Paul before his conversion: He was verily persuaded, that he did God good service in persecuting the Church; and God was pleased, even by a miracle, to inform him better of his duty.

And I rather insist upon this, than burthen your memories with too many things at once. Reason thus with yourselves:—Is it not a great mercy that God will be pleased to pardon me, for Christ's sake, though I have many ways offended him? Is it not a great favour that God has resolved (if it is not mine own fault) to make such a poor creature as I am equal to the Angels of Heaven? Is not that God greatly to be feared, who, when I am dead, can raise me to life again, and reward or punish me for ever? Are not the joys of Heaven very great, when Jesus Christ who knew them, and so many wise and good men in hopes of them, have suffered death, to encourage others to set their hearts upon them? And must not the torments of hell be terrible indeed, when nothing on earth, but fire and brimstone burning for ever, can represent them to our understandings?

Sit down, I say, and lay these things together, and think of them often, and you will at last conclude, That God is indeed worthy of your love, and all the poor service you can do him;—that God is greatly to be feared, and especially of such as live to displease him;—that none ought to despair of mercy, but such as are careless, and despise the means of grace;—that the miseries of

such as are sent into hell are enough to awaken and startle the most careless on earth, if they will but think of them;—and that to be blessed with the happiness and company of Saints and Angels, is what will make us great amends for any trouble we shall be at in our way to Heaven.

And the conclusion of this way of reasoning will be:—You will heartily desire to know the will of God, and what will please him;—you will at all times be disposed to do his will whenever you shall know it;—wherever you are under any doubt concerning the will of God, you will go to those to whom God has committed the care of your soul; you will hearken to them as to men appointed by God to make his will known to you; and if you are not sure that God has declared the contrary to what they tell you, you will obey them that have the rule over you,—for this is the command of God. And being thus honestly disposed to do your duty, you shall never want means of knowing it, or what you do shall never be laid to your charge.

After all, you must not expect that the way to Heaven and Happiness is smooth and easy, and that you will meet with no trouble in getting thither. Jesus Christ has told you otherwise: *We must, through much tribulation, enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* Agreeably to this, the Scriptures speak of suffering for the sake of Christ,—*of taking up the cross*, as he did before us,—*of denying one's-self, enduring afflictions, suffering wrongfully.*

II. Now, you must not imagine, that these Scriptures do not belong to you, for in truth they do. It is as true now, as it was in the very beginning of the Gospel: *Every one that will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.* This is what you must expect, and it is fit you should know it before-hand, that you may resolve to overcome every difficulty rather than come short of Heaven. And this was the *second particular* that I proposed to explain to you.

When you became a member of the Church of Christ, you promised "to renounce the Devil and all his works, the "poms and vanities of this wicked world, "and all the sinful lusts of the flesh." From that to your dying day, the Devil, the World, and the Flesh, are your declared enemies, and you must expect to find trouble in resisting them.

I will give you some instances, that you may consider how you will behave yourselves; whether you will give up your hopes of Heaven, or whether you will manfully fight under the banner of Christ, against sin, the world, and the Devil?—They are the

express

\* John vii. 17.



express words of Christ: "Whoever will not deny himself, cannot be my disciple."

Now, pray consider; Will you deny yourselves such things for which you have a passionate desire, if you are sure that they are displeasing to God? For example:—

*First*; It is probable that some time in your lives you may come to be pleased with such company as will corrupt you by their ill examples, if you continue to like them. Are you before-hand resolved to forsake the conversation of such persons, because you know such self-denial will be well-pleasing to God?

*2dly*; It is very probable, that you will meet with abuses in the world:—Some will wrong you without reason, and some will think they have reason, to vex and torment you. Now, in all such cases, your corrupt nature will put you upon Revenge, as the sweetest recompence you can have; and the Devil will tempt you to it undoubtedly. What will you do in this case? If you return railing for railing, and one injury for another, you will indeed please the Devil and your own wicked heart; but then you go contrary to the command of God, and most certainly displease him.

For the children of God must forgive their enemies, bless those that curse them, do good to those that hate them, and pray for those that despitefully use them and persecute them.

It is true, this will go much against the grain, and it will require pains to overcome your desires of revenge. You must strive, you must pray, and all little enough to master this temptation; and it is your wisdom before-hand to resolve what you will do in case of such trials, which, if you live, will most surely befall you.

*3dly*; What if a good bargain should come in your way, Will you quit it, if you find that your neighbour will be a sufferer by it; that you cannot have it without oppression, or injustice, or fraud? Will you, in obedience to the Law of God, which commands that no man go beyond or defraud his brother in any matter,—will you lose an opportunity of enriching yourself, rather than provoke God, who is the avenger of all such ill dealing? It is fit you should think of this, and resolve what you will do; for this is what may happen in the course of your lives.

*4thly*; If you shall happen to wrong any person in body, goods, or good name, you know what God expects from his servants;—That they acknowledge their fault, ask pardon for it, make what amends they can for the injury done, and resolve to do it no

more. Without this, however we come off in this world, God will not pardon us in the next, if we wilfully refuse this.

Now, you see how harsh this is to flesh and blood, since the very severity of the law must be used to bring people to ask forgiveness of those they have wronged. And there are so few that make restitution for the injuries they have done their neighbour, that if one were to judge by that, one would conclude, that there is no such thing as injustice in the world. So very hardly are people brought to take shame to themselves, or own they have done wickedly.

Now, it concerns you to consider this, and see whether you can resolve to submit to the way which God has prescribed his faithful servants to walk in;—whether you will humble yourselves so far as to ask pardon of any you shall have justly offended;—whether you will restore what you have taken by fraud, or craft, or violence. If you cannot resolve to do so, if ever you should be so unhappy as to fall into such sins, it will be to no purpose for you to profess yourselves Christians,—for that name will not save you in that day when God will render to every man according to his works done in the body, whether they have been good or evil.

The Apostle St. Paul<sup>1</sup> positively tells us, that "whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." You see what you must expect, if you resolve to become children of God. He will try your obedience, whether you will love, honour, and trust in him, as well when he frowns as when he smiles upon you? Well then, pray consider, how you will behave yourselves, when God shall visit you by pains or sickness of body,—by loss of goods,—by loss of children or friends,—by suffering wicked people to oppress, to backbite, to slander, to reproach you.

I must tell you before-hand, that you will be apt to repine, and be angry that God suffers such evils to befall you. And the Devil will be very busy to tempt you to think that you are very hardly dealt with.

On the other hand, God has assured us, that these are very often the effects of his love, and always so to his children. That they are designed either to punish us for what is past, that suffering in this world, we may escape the judgments of God in another life; or they are to wean us from being too fond of a world which we must very soon part from; or lastly, they are to cure us of some vices to which we are too much inclined.—But let what will be the reason of our sufferings, this we may be sure

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xii. 6.



of, that they are by the appointment of God or by his permission, and for our good, if we please.

Now, it is your wisdom to consider, what you will do when God visits you? If you can piously resolve with JESUS CHRIST, to say, "Not my will, but thine be done;"—with St. Paul, "The will of the Lord be done;"—or with good old Eli, "It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;"—then are you well prepared to be a Christian indeed. But if you cannot yet think of submitting your will to the will of God, I would by no means have you profess yourself a Christian.

"The works of the flesh" (the Scripture tells us)<sup>m</sup> "are manifest:" that is, they are easily perceived to be contrary to God's will; "such are these, Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past," saith the Apostle, "that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."

I need not tell you, that you are by nature liable to every abomination here mentioned, any one of which is enough to keep you out of Heaven, if you live and die in it unrepented of. I need not tell you that you will be tempted to most of these sins, for you have an enemy within you, which will be always soliciting you to please its desires. But this I must tell you, that if you hope to escape, you must now resolve what to do, that when you are tempted you may be able to bear up against it.

You must resolve then to avoid all temptations to these sins as much as may be; and where you cannot avoid the temptation, you must resolve to overcome it, by calling upon God for help, and using such means as your Spiritual Guide shall direct you to. You must resolve upon this now, or else it is to no purpose to say that you purpose to lead a Christian life.

And if through carelessness, presumption, violent temptations, or the like, you happen to fall into any of these sins before-named, you must resolve, by God's grace, immediately to repent and forsake it, lest you grow hardened, and careless of your soul, and drive the Spirit of God from you; for then you can never repent, never be forgiven.

*Lastly;* If it shall please God to give you a sense of your miscarriages, and your sins

<sup>m</sup> Gal. v. 19. &c.

have been such as have given an offence to the Church of God; do you resolve to give glory to God in a free confession of your sins, and after such a way as the Church and Ministers of Christ's kingdom here on earth shall appoint?

It is necessary that you should consider this, and be resolved what you will do in such a case; for as on the one hand shame will be apt to make you endeavour to avoid such an open acknowledgement; (the unthinking world may be apt to persuade you that such a formality is not necessary, and the profane world will be apt to laugh at you;)—so on the other hand, you must know, that whoever despiseth the wholesome orders of the Ministers of Christ, despiseth Christ himself, and God that sent him.

Here then will be the trial of your obedience, and you ought to resolve before-hand, whether shame, the censure of a foolish world, or any other consideration, shall hinder you from doing that, without which your pardon, in all probability, will never be sealed in Heaven.

To conclude this particular. If you can resolve in all these cases to do what you believe will be most pleasing to God, in hopes of being beloved and rewarded by him, then may you with safety and good hopes renew your baptismal vow, now and at all times:—And the grace of God will most surely be with you, to assist and bless your good endeavours, without which your best purposes and most sober resolutions would all be in vain.

III. Which brings us to the *third particular* to be explained; namely, *what assistances you may depend on, to enable you to do what you piously resolve upon.* And this is very necessary to be considered; for the Word of God assures us, and by experience we find, that all our good purposes and designs will come to nothing, unless the Spirit of God be with us, to encourage, to support, and to strengthen us.

And for this very reason the Apostles of Christ (no doubt by his appointment) began this usage in the Church of God, that after persons had by baptism been received into the Church and Household of Faith, and had been made partakers of the Covenant of Grace, the Apostles, and their successors, should lay their hands upon them, assuring them, by that sign of God's favour and goodwill towards them, that such a measure of his Holy Spirit shall accompany them, as shall be sufficient to guide, to support, and to defend them—from themselves and their own deceitful hearts,—from the world and all its vain, deceitful charms,—from the Devil, and all the powers of darkness,—till they



they come to that everlasting kingdom of which they are heirs.

Now, if this be the way by which God will bestow a greater measure of his Holy Spirit, what sober person will neglect such means of grace? Who will dare to despise this Ordinance?

But, as beneficial as this Ordinance may be to all those that make use of it, it will secure no man in the ways of holiness, but such as purpose to use their best endeavours to retain that Holy Spirit which is conferred upon them by imposition of hands. We pray, that God may defend you with his heavenly grace. We shew you, that God is ever ready to bless his own holy appointments. We may convince you, that this is one of his ordinances, and as such you may earnestly desire to be partakers of it; and yet, after all, reap no benefit by it.

For you may neglect the gift bestowed upon you, forget your promises and holy purposes, and grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by which you are sealed unto the day of redemption.

God forbid it should be so with any of you on whom I am now going to lay my hands. But since it may be so, it is fit you should have warning to be careful of your ways, and know how to value the grace of God so as not to forfeit it.

And value it surely you will, if you consider the blessing of being under the government of the Spirit of God: for then no temptation can overcome you;—the Devil cannot hurt you; for greater is he that is with you, than he that is against you. You will, by his assistance, learn to despise this world, and set your affections upon a much better. You will be enabled, by that same Spirit, to mortify the deeds of the flesh, that you may live—live as free from sin as may be here, and for ever in Heaven. For this good Spirit will enlighten your mind with saving truths; when you go astray, will pull you back; when you grow careless, will awaken you; when you want help, will assist you; when you want comfort, will rejoice your heart; when you do well, will encourage you; and when you do amiss, will correct and chasten you; until he brings you to Heaven, when all your trouble and your danger will be over, and, for the short trials you have undergone in this life, you will be made happy for ever and ever.

IV. And now you will desire to know, *By what means this good Spirit is to be secured, how you may attain the end of your Faith and Christian profession; namely, the salvation of your souls; which was the last particular we proposed to speak to.*

The Holy Psalmist set himself (as he tells us) this rule: “I set God always before me, therefore I shall not fall.” That is, he endeavoured to have these thoughts ever in his mind,—That God saw all his actions, heard all his words, and knew the very thoughts of his heart;—that therefore he might not offend God, he took care of his thoughts, words, and actions. But if at any time he had the misfortune to fall, his way was not to continue in rebellion: “I made haste,” saith he, “and delayed not to keep thy commandments.”

And thus must you do, if you hope for the continuance of God’s grace.

You must strive to live in the fear of God, remembering his judgments upon wilful sinners, frequently calling to mind the vows that are upon you, calling upon him in all your wants, and giving him thanks for every blessing you receive.

By this means, the knowledge of God will be ever present with you, and the Spirit of God will delight in you, and lead you in the way wherein you should go:—And if at any time you go astray, he will by the methods of his providence bring you back, that you may in the end be saved.

In the second place, be sure not to neglect any opportunities of improving yourselves in Christian knowledge and the grace of God, remembering, that to profane the Lord’s Day, to neglect the Holy Sacrament, to despise the advice and admonitions of your spiritual guides, is to despise the Lord; and I need not tell you what they are to expect that do so.

Be sure to let no day pass without begging God’s pardon and blessing;—for to neglect this duty, is a sure way to lead you into an indifference for God and goodness. What is the reason that you respect your parents? Is it not because you frequently receive good from them? And do you hope to keep a love for God in your hearts, unless you constantly pray to him, and constantly give him thanks for his favours; ever remembering, that it is as impossible to live a good life without God’s grace and assistance, as it is to live without food?

And pray believe me, in a matter which very nearly concerns you, when I do assure you, it is much easier now to begin to live a Christian life, than it will be hereafter. *Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth,* before evil company have corrupted you, before evil habits have got dominion over you, before the love of the world has got possession of your hearts;—for then it will be hard indeed to turn to the Lord with all your heart, when sin and hell have got the dominion over you.

In



In one word; as you hope to be saved, (and who is there that does not?) consider what you are doing,—That you are going to dedicate yourselves to God, with the full consent of your own wills; and that you have only this choice for the future, either you must be God's servants, doing his will, and serving him faithfully all the days of your lives; or the Devil will take you into his service, and you are undone for ever.

But may God bless, protect, and govern you all your days;—may he possess your hearts with such a lively sense of his great mercy in bringing you from the power of

Satan unto God, in giving you an early right to his holy Covenant, and an early knowledge of your duty, that you may honestly devote yourselves to his service, that you may receive the fullness of his grace, and be able to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

And as he has made you his children by adoption, may he bring you in his good time to his everlasting kingdom, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, glory, thanksgiving, and praise, now and for ever. Amen.

## S E R M O N LXXXIV.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE INSTRUCTION OF CHILDREN IN THE KNOWLEDGE AND FEAR OF GOD  
ONE GREAT PART OF THE DUTY OF PARENTS.

DEUT. vi. 6, 7.

*These Words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy Children.\**

**T**HAT is, as ever you value your own or your children's happiness, you must endeavour to fix and preserve in their hearts, the *knowledge*, the *fear*, and the *love* of God,—what he has *commanded*, and what he hath *forbidden*; for, without this, they will be unhappy in this world, and in the next undone for ever.

To fear God, and to keep his commands, is the whole duty and happiness of man. Forasmuch as God has declared, and determined, that he will bring every work into judgment, and every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.<sup>a</sup> And they that have done good, who have led good lives, shall go into life everlasting; and they that have done evil, who have led idle and wicked lives, and have not repented, and brought forth fruits meet for repentance, shall go into everlasting fire.<sup>o</sup>

Certainly, parents do not consider this so well as they should do, or they would not suffer their children to grow *wild*, and *wicked*, and *ignorant* of God, and of their duty, as too many of them do.

Parents are obliged, both by nature and grace, to take care of their own children;—to instruct, to restrain, and to correct them. And they that do not do so, do, by a just

judgment of God, bring upon themselves sorrow, and upon their country a curse, by breeding up so many children of Satan, to corrupt their neighbours.

Parents are very often the greatest enemies that their children have. Some leave them riches, not always honestly gotten; and these become a curse to their children, and not a blessing.

Others strive all their life long to leave their children a great deal, which too often becomes a snare and a temptation; makes their children forget their dependance upon God, and the duty they owe their Maker.

Many, very many parents are so blind, that they cannot, or so perverse that they will not, see their children's faults, nor correct them. Such parents very often live to see their children, to their sorrow, disobedient, stubborn, self-willed, neither minding their commands, nor their advice.

There are parents so little concerned for their children's welfare, that they let them have their own will and ways. They see their children keep idle and wicked company; they see them given to lying, to swearing, to the taking of God's name to idle and wicked purposes, to the profaning of the Lord's Day; and often without rebuking

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. xii. 13. <sup>o</sup> Matth. xxv.

\* See Prov. xxii. 6.

them,



them, seldom chastising them, though they are in the ready way to destruction.

Lastly; Too many parents deprive their children of a comfortable subsistence, many by drinking away their estates, others by idleness, prodigality, litigiousness, and many such extravagant ways, by which their children are exposed to hardships and misery, and are tempted to take unlawful ways to get their bread. This is a crime so barbarous, so cruel, so unnatural, that a thief, in comparison of such a parent, is a better man.

One might insist much more upon the faults of too many parents, by which they leave a miserable or a wicked posterity behind them, for which they must answer in another world. But this is not what the subject we are upon leads us to, for this is, *To shew what parents ought to do,—what is in their power to do, in order to make themselves and their children happy in this and in a better world.* “These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children;” that is, You shall take all occasions of instructing your children in the knowledge and fear of God.

God himself compares his love for such as fear him, to the love of parents for their children. “As a father pitieth his own children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him.”

Let us consider how parents should shew their love and pity for their children:—

The first and most necessary duty of parents is, *to pray for their children.* Parents should know, and they should consider, that their children have from them a nature corrupt, and prone to evil; and that if they are not hindered by the grace or providence of God, they will ruin themselves as sure as they live; and when they die, they will be lost for ever. Wretchedly careless therefore, and wicked, are those parents, who do not carefully beg the blessing of God upon their children, and earnestly pray that God’s grace may prevent and follow them all the days of their life.

It was the observation of a very good man, *That the children of many prayers and tears do not often miscarry.* I would to God that every parent that hears it would remember this.

And so we proceed to the next duty of parents; which is, to watch over that corrupt nature of their children, which is *prone to evil continually.* We must be very particular upon this head, as ever we hope to do any great good.

<sup>a</sup> Pf. ciii. 13.

A proneness to the sin of *lying* is one of the first fruits and signs of a corrupt nature. Whether children tell lies in jest, or to excuse their faults, or to abuse those they do not love, they ought to be told, over and over again, that it is really the devil that tempts them to lie; for, saith our Lord Christ, “He is a liar, and the father of lies.”<sup>a</sup> That it is one of those sins which the Lord hateth in an especial manner.<sup>c</sup> They ought to be put often in mind, that it is an odious and a shameful vice to be caught in a lie, and that it is seldom that one lie is not followed by another to excuse it. Let them know how much better it is, and becoming a good child, to tell the truth, and take blame upon themselves, rather than excuse a fault by a lie. Lastly; let your child know for certain, that it is a vice much harder to be left off than they are aware of. If all this will not prevent or cure a child of this vice, repeated correction ought to be made use of; lest, as the Spirit of God assures us, he have his portion with liars, in the lake that burneth with fire and brimstone.

There is another evil which children, through bad examples, and the temptation of the devil, are very prone to; and that is, *taking God’s name in vain*; making use of the name of the great God on every foolish and idle occasion. Parents should be very careful to admonish and to correct their children betimes, to prevent them from falling into this sin, which is so offensive to God, that he has threatened to punish it in a most especial manner.

And indeed it very naturally leads to many more damnable sins, to *curfing*, to *swearing*, and even to *perjury*. They that are prone to lie, and to swear in common conversation, will be strongly tempted to forswear themselves, when a great temptation comes in their way; they having grieved the good Spirit of God, and an evil spirit having taken possession of them. That it really is so, is plain from a man’s being tempted to a crime of so high a nature, that it is, in effect, *the denying of God*.

Too many, I am afraid, are ignorant of the greatness of this sin; otherwise no Christian would be guilty of *perjury*, either to gain the whole world, or to escape the greatest punishment that man can suffer.

For every man that perjures himself saith in effect, ‘I do not fear what God can do unto me.’ A man that takes an oath calls upon God to be a witness of what he is going to swear to. If he swears to what he knows to be false, he cannot put a greater contempt upon God,—as if God did not

<sup>a</sup> John viii. 44. <sup>c</sup> Prov. vi.

know



know what men do and swear, or that he could not punish the affront.

SO HELP ME GOD! is an expression which should never be lightly repeated, either by such as administer an oath, or by those that take an oath; forasmuch as every man who repeats these words to countenance an untruth, renounces the help of God, and this not only for himself, but even for his family. "A curse" (saith God, Zech. v. 4.) "A curse shall enter into the house of every one that sweareth falsely by my name, and shall consume it."

You see what reason all parents have not to suffer their children to make use of the name of God to any idle or wicked purposes, this being the ready way to perjury when they come to be men, having in their youth lost the fear of God, and a reverence for his name.

PROFANING THE LORD'S DAY is another great sin, which children are but too apt, if not timely restrained, to run into. They have, when young, little or no knowledge of the necessity of God's grace, or mercy, or help, or blessing; and therefore are not much concerned to go to church to ask these favours.

This indifference, if not corrected, will grow up with them, and they will live and die in a careless neglect of the ordinances of God. Parents therefore should let their children know betimes,—That they are by nature sinners, and prone to evil;—that without the grace of God they will be undone for ever;—that as ever they hope for God's pardon, and grace, and blessing, they must pray for them;—that God has appointed one day in seven, to the end, that men, laying aside all worldly business and care for the body, may take care of their souls, and honour their Creator and Redeemer, by going to his house, and there begging his pardon, and giving him thanks for his mercies.

In one word; Your children ought to be told over and over again, that they need not be at pains to go to hell; that they will go thither of course, if they will not go to church, and there learn how to escape damnation.

They should be put in mind also, that the neglect of the publick worship of God is the beginning of every wickedness. That even criminals at the gallows generally confess this, that the *breach of the Sabbath*, and the neglect of the publick worship, was the beginning of those sins which brought them to an untimely end.

KEEPING OF IDLE AND LOOSE COMPANY has been the ruin of an infinite number of

young people. Parents complain too late of the ill ways their children take, when they have suffered them, without reproof, and without correction, to follow their own ways in the choice of the company they keep.

How many wicked oaths, curses, and other blasphemous expressions, must children hear and learn, when they are suffered to keep wicked company! How often will they hear the name of God taken in vain! How often will they hear sin, and hell, and damnation, made a mock of, even till they learn to do it themselves! And then it is a miracle if they are not lost for ever.

Parents therefore should often put their children in mind, that the devil is in all wicked companies, and especially where God, or any thing that belongs to God, is dishonoured or profaned.

And lastly, they should be often put in mind, how hard it will be to leave off most of those sins which they have been accustomed to hear, and take delight in.

PRIDE is a vice easily seen and hated in grown people; but it is not considered, that the seeds of pride are sown in youth. If parents will suffer their children to have their own wills in almost every thing;—if they will deny them nothing they have a mind to;—if they will be pleased even with their faults and failings;—they must expect, that when they are grown up, they will over-value themselves, and despise others;—not suffer themselves to be contradicted right or wrong;—they will be headstrong, self-willed, not to be persuaded;—they will not see their own faults, but even defend them;—they will not be beholden to any body for advice;—their parents counsel shall be set little by, and the instruction and reproof of the very Ministers of God shall be despised.—These and many others are the instances of pride begun in youth, for want of parents teaching their children to be humble, modest, and obedient.

There is another instance of pride both pernicious and common, *the making children in love with finery*. Parents do not always see the evil effects of this. They will see it to their sorrow, when their children are grown up, and put them to expences beyond their ability or condition;—when they are tempted to take unlawful ways to be finer than they ought to be;—and when by this they give occasion to men of lewd lives to make attempts upon their chastity.

Parents should rather take all occasions to instil into their children this most certain truth,—That nobody ever was, or will be respected the more for being finer than their

state



state or condition of life requires, but rather become the scorn and contempt of others.

To proceed:—If parents would but take a little more pains to give their children a great abhorrence of the most shameful vice of *pilfering* and *stealing*, we should not have so many complaints of people when they are grown up being given to the scandalous sin of defrauding their masters or parents of their goods.

Children should be seriously and often warned against setting their hearts upon what is not their own, and that it will never prosper with them;—and that they will be tempted from small sins of this kind to greater, which has at last brought many a man and woman to the gallows, (by a just judgment of God) who little thought of coming to such an untimely end.

The seeds of *INTEMPERANCE*, of *GLUTTONY*, and *DRUNKENNESS*, are very often sown in youth, and grow up with their years. And a sad account parents will have to give, who indulge their children in any of these vices.

In the first place, they lay a sure foundation for future miseries;—for sickness,—very often for poverty,—for the ruin of their families,—for untimely death, and too too often for death eternal.

Parents, instead of indulging their children in any thing that leads to any of these vices, should endeavour all they can to make them sensible,—That by giving way to their appetites they are making themselves bonds which cannot easily be broken;—that it will cost them dear to leave off the love of *drink*, of eating to intemperance, of being fond of dainties. They should therefore use them betimes to a sober way of living;—to deny their appetites;—to lay a prudent restraint upon them before custom is become a second nature. Their children should be often put in mind, that meat and drink are the gifts of God;—that we should never take them without begging his blessing upon them, and giving him thanks for them;—and that the doing of this is the likeliest way to keep us from abusing any of the gifts of God to his dishonour and our own misery.

*YOUTHFUL LUSTS* are very naturally and too often the fruits of intemperance. “Whoredom and wine” (saith the Spirit) “take away the heart;” that is, All fear of God, all care for the soul, all concern for what must come hereafter. In short; the sins of impurity and uncleanness will in time root out all good principles, make men forget their most solemn resolutions, and grieve that Holy Spirit by which we are sealed unto the day of redemption.

• Hosea iv. 11.

And yet these are crimes too often laughed at, made a jest of, and committed, without fear of the judgment and vengeance of God, with which he has threatened such sinners, to make them have their portion with devils, and everlasting fire.

What pains, therefore, ought parents to take to save their children from falling into these sins, and the punishment which certainly attends them? How often should they repeat to them the lesson which saved Joseph from being ruined by this sin: “How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” How often should they put them in mind of the truth set down by the wisest of men: “The house of the whore is the way to hell.”

How careful should they be to warn them against keeping immodest, unchaste, and loose company; against hearing filthy talk, lewd songs, wanton discourses, which corrupt the heart before people are aware of the mischief!

How often should young maids be told,—That when they lose their modesty, they lose a great grace of God, and a great guard and security against all manner of wickedness!

How often should young men be put in mind of this great truth,—That to corrupt and debauch others is to make themselves liable to a double damnation!

In one word; Parents who have any love or regard either for themselves, or their children's welfare, reputation, or happiness in this world, or the world to come, will be very careful to watch over their children's conduct with regard to the sins of impurity and uncleanness, which will as surely shut them out of Heaven, as that God is there.

We shall only mention one other evil, which children are prone to continually; and this is, *TO IDLENESS*, which will be attended with infinite mischiefs, if not prevented by good instruction, and wholesome discipline.

There is a state of life to which every man is called;—and he that fancies that he has nothing to do, no work to answer for, the devil will find that man work enough.

Children, therefore, should not be suffered to get a slothful habit of squandering away their time in doing nothing, or that which is worse than nothing. “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth,” is a truth, which, if often repeated, would, one would hope, cure the most sluggish waster of his time and talents.

• Prov. vii. 27.

Thus



Thus far we have considered the duty of parents to teach their children. And parents who neglect this duty will be most inexcusable, because there is not one of these duties but what the most unlearned parent is capable of performing. But the truth is, too many parents are little concerned whether their children are like to go to heaven or hell. They neither teach them, by their advice or example, how to attain the one or escape the other: And if the tender love of God for the salvation of his poor creatures had not made other provision for their safety, they must inevitably have perished.

Now, the provisions which God has made for the salvation of men are *the Ordinances of the Gospel*, which are the ordinary means of grace and salvation.

By *Baptism*, we are admitted into the congregation of Christ's flock; and by that ordinance we had the Holy Spirit communicated to us, for a principle of a new and spiritual life.

At *Confirmation*, you are called upon to consider this more seriously;—to consider the sad consequence of grieving that Holy Spirit,—of falling into an idle, careless, and wicked course of life.

This is what I will, in few words, set before you,—before you, who have been instructed, and know why you come to be confirmed.

You who have put on solemn resolutions of living as becomes the Gospel of Christ;—who, being sensible of the weakness and corruption of your nature, do resolve to pray for the continuance and increase of the gifts of God's Holy Spirit, who alone can keep you in the way of salvation;—to you I now apply, beseeching you, as many as understand me, to consider and remember what I now say to you.

Remember, that while you keep the vows which you are going to renew, you will be under the especial protection and guidance of God and his good angels;—you will be secured against the great enemy of our souls, who is continually seeking whom he may devour; that is, such as he finds have by their wicked lives taken themselves from under God's especial protection.

On the other hand, if you forget the promises and good purposes you are going to

renew before God and this congregation, you will grieve the Spirit of God, and force him to leave you to your own corrupt nature and choices; and to Satan, who governs all such as are forsaken of God's Spirit.

This you may be sure of, from what you may observe happens every day.

You see people, who have been bred, and for some time lived like Christians, have become afterwards as careless, and as wicked, as if they believed neither God nor religion, neither heaven nor hell.

Let me, therefore, admonish you of those things which force the good Spirit to leave men to themselves. The Apostle tells us, "That they that will not retain God in their knowledge, God will give them up to a reprobate mind;" that is, to a mind void of judgment.

This is the first step to ruin. God puts into people's hearts good thoughts, good purposes, good resolutions: These they forget, nor will they mind the checks of conscience,—which is God's voice speaking to them,—till at last he leaves them to take their own ways.

To conclude:—Do not depend upon this ordinance as a charm, or hope for any benefit by it, without observing the conditions of God's promises and blessing: "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

It was the Apostle's own declaration, "Neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." So be you assured of it, that neither *Christian Baptism*, nor *Confirmation*, nor any other ordinance of the Gospel, will profit any person without an holy life.

May the good Spirit of God keep this ever in your hearts and minds! May God give you the Spirit of Wisdom, to choose what is good;—the spirit of understanding, to know your duty;—the spirit of counsel, in all your doubts;—the spirit of godly strength, to resist temptations to sin;—the spirit of holiness, to be conformed to the will of God;—the spirit of piety, in all your actions:—And fill them, O God, with the Spirit of thy holy fear, now and evermore, for Jesus Christ his sake.

To whom, with Thee, and that Holy Spirit, be all honour, glory, and power, now and for ever. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> Rom. i. 28,



## S E R M O N LXXXV.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF EXPECTING THE BLESSINGS OF CHRISTIANITY,  
WITHOUT LEADING A CHRISTIAN LIFE.

E P H E S. iv. 17.

*This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk in the vanity of their mind; [that is, following their own wicked inclinations.\*]*

THERE cannot be too much pains taken to forewarn Christians against satisfying themselves with the bare performance of the outward duties of religion.

It is probable, that there are more people lost, who thought themselves safe, than of such who, knowing that they had no religion, had therefore no hopes of salvation.

A man who goes constantly to church (for instance) will be apt to think himself in a better condition than one who does so seldom or never. I should be loth to encourage a man to think so of himself, till I see whether his going to church makes him a better man than the other who stays at home. If it does not, pray what will his going to church profit him? You will say he is in the way of knowing his duty. Be it so. But to know one's duty, and not to do it, is to be in a worse condition than if one had never had the means of knowing it. For "unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required."

Now, that this is really the case of the generality of Christians, any body will be satisfied, who does but seriously observe what passes in the world. For example:—Consider how very careful people are to have their children dedicated to God in *Baptism*, and what a great misfortune they would think it, if they were in a place where they could not have that Sacrament duly administered; and yet, generally speaking, there is as little care taken, by these very parents, to have their children taught the meaning of this Ordinance, and the obligations it lays their children under, as if it had been a matter of no consequence, whether they had been baptised or not. But you will say, however, they are hereby within the Covenant of Grace, and that is a great blessing. So it is, provided they understand it, and are taught to keep it. But let me put you in mind,—that just thus were Chorah, Da-

than, and Abiram, within the Covenant; and yet they went alive into the pit. So was Judas himself. So were all those who yet have taken the broad way, and are this very moment lamenting their lost condition in another life.

But one would hope better things of such as, with their own mouth and consent, (in the presence of God and his Church) do ratify, and confirm, and acknowledge themselves bound to *believe*, and to *do*, all those things which were promised for them in Baptism. One would hope better things of these. But, God knows, it is too often otherways. And you shall see too many, who have thus solemnly given themselves up to God, as careless how they live, as if they had never been *baptised*, never been *confirmed*.

Let us, in the next place, consider Christians in one of the most solemn duties of Christianity. If ever Christians are serious, and put on holy purposes of living as becomes their profession, it must sure be when they go to the *Lord's Supper*. But what will you think of Christians who come from the Lord's Table, without *Charity*, without purposes of becoming better men, better neighbours, better Christians, for the time to come? You must say, that they do not understand their religion, or that they hope their profession will do them good without a suitable practice.

We see people every day going out of the world, seemingly satisfied with their condition, without having made any Christian preparation for that great change. Could this possibly be, but that Christians hope, that their Baptism, and being within the Covenant, will save them, like a charm, they know not how?

These observations may convince you, That Nature is extremely corrupt,—that we are blind, and most apt to deceive ourselves in matters of the greatest concern to us,—

\* Luke xii. 48.

\* See Rom. i. 18. 2 Tim. iii. 5. 1 Pet. iv. 3.



and that Christians ought to be often called upon to consider their profession, and what it obliges them to;—and that to think to enjoy the blessings of Christianity, without leading a Christian life, is a very great delusion. “I conjure you,” saith the Apostle in the text, “I conjure you by the Lord, “that ye henceforth walk not” that is, live not, “as other Gentiles,” or as men unconcerned do, “in the vanity of their mind;” that is, following their own corrupt inclinations, and vainly hoping that an outward religion, without an inward sense of God, and a practice suitable to it, will gain his favour, and make them happy when they die.

It is thus that people unconverted live. A Christian is to live after another manner, as he hopes for salvation. A Christian ought to know, that this is not the world he was made for;—that by his profession he is not to love the world;—that it is impossible for any man to love the world, and be a friend of God. It is true, these are hard sayings to flesh and blood, and it is utterly impossible for any man, without the grace of God, to receive them and live accordingly; for we are in a state of deep corruption.

But then the design of religion is, to deliver us out of this miserable state;—to restore us to the favour of God;—to obtain his grace to enable us to do what *by nature* we are not able to do;—to gain us a title to eternal happiness, which we have no right, no pretence to.

Now, the Christian Religion, where men embrace it sincerely, will do all this for us. If a man *fears God, trembles at his Word*, believes the promises of God made to us when we were baptised;—if a man is afraid of offending God, sorry for it when he knows he has done amiss;—begs God’s pardon, prays for his grace;—keeps out of the way of temptation,—makes use of the means of grace which God affords him:—Whoever does this sincerely, may depend upon it, that God will give him a *new heart, new desires, a better understanding, more strength, a firmer faith, and well-grounded hope*; or, in the words of Scripture, he will become a *new man, a new creation*. And then he will see plainly, that religion is as necessary for a man who would save his soul, as meat and drink are for a man who would preserve his body from death.

But if, instead of doing this, Christians, notwithstanding their promises, will follow the inclinations of their own hearts, which too often lead to sin; why then religion will become a burthen to them;—they will get into a way and a habit of sinning; and, wanting strength to break the bonds in which sin has laid them fast, they will have nothing left but anguish and despair;—they will

commit iniquities with greediness, and not see their danger till there are no hopes of a remedy.

I know very well what people are apt to say in their hearts to all this. All this ado cannot be expected from us;—we are ignorant;—we have too much of other business upon our hands;—it is enough if we can do the outward duties of religion;—let those that have more *learning and time, think, and watch, and pray*, and keep out of the way of temptations.

This is the language of those who would lead a careless life, and yet expect to be happy. To all which one may give *these short answers*:—

Those who say they have no *time* do not, it seems, know what it is that Religion requires of them. He is not always the best Christian who spends most time in reading and praying, but he who honestly discharges the duties of his place and calling.

And if a poor man, who is burthened with a family, or encumbered with business, will yet find a minute’s time to pray for God’s grace and blessing as well as he can, and give God thanks for the favours he receives;—if he is content with his condition, and does not attempt to better it by unjust ways;—if he teaches his children to fear God, and takes care to correct them when they do what they should not;—if he is upright in his dealings, obedient to his governors, peaceable in his conversation, temperate in his way of living, and in charity with his neighbours;—why, this man’s Religion is such as it should be, and here is no great deal of time spent in doing what he ought to do.

So that *want of time* will never be a just excuse for any man for not being as good a Christian as he ought to be. Much less *want of learning*. And yet people are apt to think so. At the same time, if any man should take upon him to preach and to advise men to live at the rate most people do live, he would be looked upon as the worst of men, even by the most ignorant man that should hear him. If a man should tell you, you need not be over exact in your dealings, —nor do to others as you would wish to be dealt with yourself;—if he should bid you to enjoy the world while you may, and take no thought for what may come hereafter;—if he should tell you, that as wise people as you have done so, and have put off their repentance to the last moment of their lives;—the most ignorant would soon say, this is no safe doctrine, we understand better than so ourselves. Do you so? Why then, ignorance will be *no cloak for your sin*, neither now, nor at the day of judgment.

But



But how shall one resist so many temptations that he is sure to meet with? Christianity furnishes you with sufficient means of *avoiding, resisting, or overcoming*, all the difficulties you can possibly meet with, *provided you embrace it in good earnest*. God, who has set us in the midst of temptations, and yet requires us not to yield to them, has bound himself to help us, if we do *our duty*.

But here is the cheat we put upon ourselves: Our inclinations lead us to do something or other which we know God has forbidden us;—we do not consider that he has forbidden us such things out of pure love to our souls. We first wish that he had not forbidden us,—then we consider all the difficulties we have to struggle with,—then we flatter ourselves with the hopes that God, who knows our circumstances, will pardon our transgressions; we consider his *goodness*, but not his *justice*, or else we hope some time or other to repent, and make satisfaction for the fault, and so we commit it without further scruple or reflection.

Whereas a serious Christian, in the first place, keeps out of the way of temptation as much as may be. By that he shews his love to God, whom he would not willingly offend. If he cannot well avoid the temptation, then he soberly resolves not to yield to it;—he considers who it is that he shall offend if he should do so;—he reflects upon the solemn promises he has made of not doing any thing which God has forbidden him;—and, knowing that God is able and ready to help him, he flees to *him* for succour and grace to withstand the temptation, and he is sure to find help in time of need.

But the generality of Christians live without laying these things much to heart;—the more is the pity. But will you go headlong to destruction, because other people are running careless to their ruin? A wise man will not ask, what do others do; but what is it that God would have me do? What does my profession require of me?

When once people find that a Christian is resolved to live so as becomes his character, they will not expect that he should do as the world does,—live at all adventures,—nay, they will censure him if he does so. This man, they will say, makes profession of Christianity; why does he not live as becomes a Christian?

In short; few people are so hardened as to say *I am resolved to have no Religion*; but there are an infinite number of Christians who are content to live like Heathens, and yet hope that all will be well with them at the last. What shall one say to make them sensible of their stupidity? Shall we ask them, whe her they believe an eternity to

come, of endless joys or endless misery? Yes, they will say, they do. What, and yet live as if you neither feared nor believed them? *Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness*, is one of the very first precepts of that Gospel which you have embraced. And is it no uneasiness to your mind, to know that it is the least thing in your thoughts, the very last in your intention? And will you hope to shelter yourself from the wrath of God, by an outward profession of Christianity? Why, be well assured, that there is no man so far from salvation, as one who is got into the way of doing what good Christians do, without being inwardly converted; who have (as the Apostle speaks) a form of godliness, but denying the power; not suffering Christianity to make them one jot better men.

Christians, therefore, should be very careful to avoid falling into a state so dangerous. To prevent which, we should often and sometimes consider, how very difficult it is to get rid of evil habits, when once we have suffered them to *take deep root*. A tree, which with one hand may be pulled up this year, the *next* may be grown so big, as all one's force shall not be able to remove it out of its place. And Christians find, *by sad experience*, when once an evil habit of *living without God* has been suffered to get ground, it is no very easy matter to root it up, and master it;—and yet it must be mastered, or we are for ever undone. Therefore, where Christians have been so unhappy as to fall into a careless way of living, the very best thing they can do is, *to repent forthwith*, lest the work grow too big to be undertaken, and at last they despair of ever returning to a sober mind.

This thing is set forth in a very lively manner, by one of the Fathers, in words to this purpose: “An hermit is carried by an Angel into a wood, where he sees an old man cutting down boughs to make up a burthen; when it was pretty big, he attempts to carry it away; but finding it very heavy, he lays it down again, cuts more wood, makes the burthen greater, and then in vain tries to carry it off. Having done this several times, the hermit in the mean while being astonished at the old man's folly, the Angel tells him, this is an exact representation of those Christians, who, being sensible of the burthen of their sins, resolve to repent, but soon grow weary, and instead of lessening their burthen, they increase it, still resolving to repent, till the burthen grows too heavy to be borne, and then in great despair they die in their sins unrepented of.”

Now this, God knows, is the case of too many, who, when they should set about the work



work of repentance, make it every day more difficult, by deferring it.

Those who have dedicated themselves to God betimes, and have not yet fallen into a careless way of living, would do well to consider what bitter work they are preparing for themselves, when they forget the vows which they have made so solemnly.

In short; without the grace of God, no man can live as becomes a Christian. The grace of God can be *secured* only by keeping a strict watch upon ourselves, and *increased*, by making use of what one has already. They that do so, may depend upon the favour of God; and they will be sure to escape a great deal of trouble and remorse of conscience in this world, and misery in the next.

I should now conclude; only I suspect that a great many Christians may think themselves no way concerned in what I have said upon this head. Few think themselves in any danger, who are not profligate sinners. After all; men may be in great hazard of their salvation, who yet are not taken notice of for scandalous livers.

Every man may best judge for himself by such marks as these:—

First, *Every one who holds the truth in unrighteousness*, that is, all who do not live up to what they know to be most pleasing to God;—

Secondly; All who have no concern for their eternal welfare, after God has made known to us, by his Son, the rewards and punishments of another life;—

Thirdly; All who have their hearts so much taken up with the world, that they cannot apply themselves seriously to the care of their souls;—

Fourthly; All who, though they pretend to serve God, yet do it with that indifference, that God is rather dishonoured than glorified by their service; who give scandal by their irreverence, and behave themselves before their Maker as if he were an idol,

who neither *heard* nor *saw* the devotions of his worshippers;—

In short; All who live in a general neglect of their duty, though they are not guilty of such gross sins as make them scandalous:—All these, I say, may be assured of it, that they live under God's displeasure; and their hope of salvation is nothing but a delusion.

And God grant that all who are concerned may think of it, while it is in their power, by the help of God, to prevent the evil consequences of living without any true religion.

On the other hand; All such as are convinced, that the design of Christianity is, to make men holy, that they may be happy;—that Jesus Christ came indeed to *redeem us from the wrath to come*, but that he must first redeem us from *our vain conversation*. Such as know, and in good earnest believe this, and are disposed to let Christianity have this effect upon them, *to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God*;—such as are resolved, by the grace of God, *that the time past of their lives shall suffice to have wrought the will of the Gentiles*,—that they will no longer hold the truth in *unrighteousness*, but will let Christianity have its effect upon their lives, as well as upon their faith;—such as know their own frailty, and come to God for help, and use the means of grace which he has appointed for our recovery and salvation, and find the effects of God's grace in the change that is wrought in them for the better:—All such have the comfort of knowing, that their Religion is what it should be;—that they have not only *the form* of godliness, but *the power* thereof;—and that their portion in the world to come shall be much better than if they had continued to have walked (that is, lived) as other Gentiles, or as men unconverted do, in the vanity of their minds, that is, following their own corrupt inclinations.

From which vanity, and the evil that attends it, the good Lord deliver us all, for Jesus Christ's sake. To whom, &c.



## S E R M O N LXXXVI.

PREACHED AT A CONFIRMATION.

THE SIN AND DANGER OF GRIEVING THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD.

E P H E S. iv. 30.

*And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

**B**EFORE I enter upon this subject, I will endeavour to satisfy you, that notwithstanding the good purposes you have this day made, and notwithstanding the good prayers which are offered up to God on your behalf, there is yet a greater possibility of your miscarrying than you are aware of.

The reason why I observe this to you is, because I know the frailty of human nature better than you can be supposed to do.

When a person is made sensible of his duty to God, and that it is truly his interest to serve him faithfully, and that there is great uneasiness and dangers in the ways of vice and impiety;—while these thoughts are warm in his heart, he is apt to be very confident that he, for his part, shall never run into that wickedness which others fall into, and by which they are ruined.

And if I should take any of you, (*who have this day been confirmed in your holy purposes of obedience*) if I should call you aside, and give you this advice:—‘Pray have a care lest you fall into the sins of drunkenness, or whoredom, which are but too common amongst us;—have a care of lying, or swearing, or stealing, which will certainly shut you out of Heaven;’—it is very probable these would be your thoughts, and your answer:—‘I am fully resolved against all such great crimes;—I have no manner of inclination to drink too much;—I know not what it is to be unchaste; but this I know, that it is better to marry than to burn;—I am so far from the danger of swearing, that I am uneasy when I hear others swear;—and for lying, and stealing, I wonder that any body should fear that I could ever be guilty of such crimes.’

Now, you must know, that this is the confidence of unexperienced Christians; for those that know themselves better, know, that *there is nothing more deceitful than the heart of man*, and that in time, if we give way to our desires, we shall love those very things which now we abhor, and do those

wickednesses which at present we had rather suffer death than be guilty of.

And that you may be satisfied that this is very true, I will give you two instances out of the Holy Scriptures, *one out of the Old, and another out of the New Testament*, which may convince you, that no man ought to be confident of himself, what he will be, and what he will do; but that it will become the very wisest, and the best of us, to be very careful of our ways, and to look up to God for help, by whose Spirit alone, those that are not as wicked as their neighbours are preserved from being so; and if we do not take care of ourselves, and beg of God to take us under his guidance and blessing, we may too likely fall into those very sins to which at present we have no manner of inclination.

When Elijah told Hazael, that he should do very severe things to Israel,—that he would burn their cities, dash their children, and rip up their women with child;” Hazael was at that time so far from such thoughts, that he asks, “What, am I a dog, that I should do this?” And yet, in process of time, he did this; and became one of the greatest scourges that Israel had.

St. Peter had, perhaps, as much natural courage as most men, as appears by his behaviour in the garden; and he had positively given his master his word, “If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise;” and yet within twelve hours after, he swears he knows him not. What account can be given of this? Why, *this* was the cause of such a strange alteration in the Apostle:—He trusted to his own strength, and God for that time left him to himself, and you see what followed.

And so it will ever be, when God, for our sins, leaves us to ourselves. There is not the vilest thing we now abhor, nor the basest vice which we may not be guilty of, if ever the Spirit of God gives us up to the government of our own wills.

2 Kings viii. 12.



And now you see, that notwithstanding the good purposes and resolutions you have this day made, and the prayers that have been offered up for you, it is necessary that you should be put in mind of the danger you are in, if, by any wilful continuing in known sin, you grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and force him to leave you to yourselves.

To come, therefore, to the words of the text, and to the Apostle's advice,—*Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

The plain meaning of these words is this:—God has given you the earnest of his Spirit into your hearts,—by which you have been taught your duty,—by which you have inclinations to perform it,—and by which, if you persevere, you will be secured against all dangers, and under all temptations, till you come to Heaven, where all dangers will be over.

But take great care, that you grieve not this Holy Spirit, and force him, by any great wickedness, or by continuing in a wilful course of sin, to leave you to yourself, and to the power of the devil;—for if you do this, you are undone for ever;—if the Holy Spirit takes off his seal, the devil marks you for himself, and for eternal misery.

And this is literally true, and may be justly said to all you who have this day been confirmed.

God, whose good blessing goes along with the wholesome methods of his church, has given you such a proportion of his Spirit, as will for the present secure you from danger, and will, as you go on to make use of these measures of grace, still give you greater, till you come to Heaven.

Take good heed, therefore, that you do not abuse this great blessing, by making yourselves unfit for the Spirit of God to dwell in your hearts; for if you continue to grieve the Holy Spirit, he will at last leave you; and when you are left of God, it is not in the power of all the world besides to make you amends for such a loss.

But that you may be more sensible of this, I will lay before you these following things to be seriously considered by you:—

*First*; What your condition is, while you continue under the government and protection of God's Holy Spirit.

*Secondly*; What your condition and circumstances will be, if you shall be so unhappy as to drive that Holy Spirit from you.

*Thirdly*; I will shew you what those things are which do most offend and grieve him.

*Lastly*; I will propose to you a method of living, which will, by God's good blessing, secure you of his favour, and bring you to Heaven.

I. And, first, *What your condition is while you continue under the government and protection of God's Holy Spirit.*

Now, while you continue in covenant with God, "you are reconciled to him by the death of his Son." This frees the mind from fear of future evils. You are under his immediate protection; no temptation shall so far get the dominion over you as to separate you from Christ. If (as the Apostle speaks) God has sent his Spirit into your hearts, whereby you may call upon God as a Father, then you know how tenderly concerned a father is for the welfare of his children: And these expressions are made use of in the Holy Scriptures to give us apprehensions of God's favourable concern for his children and servants.

To be particular:—

While you continue under the government of God, you are secured from the danger of the great enemy of mankind, the devil, whose power, when God permits him to make use of it, is much greater than is generally thought of. He did once but get leave from God to try his force with Job, and you see what a number of calamities fell upon the head of that good man.

And another instance in the New Testament we have, which may convince us of the great power of the devil, when he is let loose to do what he pleases: Two thousand swine were by him at once choaked in the sea, when Christ permitted it so to be; which being a single instance of any of our Saviour's miracles which were attended with such a seeming damage, it is most likely it was to convince the world of the great power of the devil to hurt the creatures of God, when God permits him so to do, for the punishment of perverse mankind.

And now, pray consider, what a blessing it is to be assured, that this enemy, with all his power, cannot injure you;—and injure you he cannot, while the Holy Spirit of God governs you. He may tempt you to sin, and he may tempt others to seduce you, but then you may be at ease with this Scripture in your heart: "Greater is he that is in you," (that is, the Holy Spirit) "than he that is in the world;" that is, the Devil.

And this brings us to consider another great advantage which the earnest of God's Spirit secures to you. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Afflic-

\* Rom. v. 10.

tions,



tions, distempers of body and mind, great crosses, unavoidable calamities, befall all sorts of men. This is an observation made by Solomon: for in that sense his words are; "No man knoweth love or hatred by all that is before them." But though afflictions happen to all, yet they have a very different effect upon men, as they light upon the righteous or the wicked.

When afflictions and troubles befall a man whose heart is governed by the Spirit of God, they are so far from being a burthen to him, that he receives them thankfully, calls them a fatherly correction, is confident that they are designed for his good, bears them therefore with patience, and grows better, and is really a gainer, by what the world calls misfortunes.

On the other hand; where the Spirit of God is absent, when afflictions seize men, they are impatient, and suffer more by that than by the calamity which caused it;—they ascribe all they suffer to the malice of men, or to an ill-governed nature, or to chance, or to any thing but the true cause;—and, after all their sufferings, they are not one jot the better for what they have undergone.

Let any man judge whether of these two have the better of it.

Lastly; the Spirit of God, which is given you, has this happy effect upon you; you are hereby sealed unto the day of redemption; that is, to eternal happiness. You are not put into immediate possession of Heaven; but if the Holy Spirit dwell in your hearts, you are, so long, as sure of Heaven as those that are actually there. But then every man that has this hope purifies himself, keeps himself unspotted from the world, and grieves not the Holy Spirit so long, till he is forced to forsake his charge.

II. And this brings us to the *second particular*, which was to consider, *What your condition will be if you should be so unhappy as to grieve and drive that Holy Spirit from you.* If I should only tell you, that then you will be left to yourselves, even that is a most dreadful condition.

We look upon it as a great misfortune, when a young man who is born to a plentiful estate comes to it, and is master of himself, before he has experience to govern either the one or the other; and we judge truly, and it happens accordingly, that an estate to such a man is rather a curse than a blessing.

But sure, to be left to one's self in a spiritual sense, is a much greater misfortune,

7 Eccles. ix. 1.

—as much greater, as the soul is more valuable than the body or an estate: And therefore every wise man heartily begs of God,—“Leave me not in the hands of my own counsel.”

But though this is bad enough, yet this is not the worst of it. For when the Spirit of God forsakes us, the enemy of mankind takes the government of us; and then we shall soon change our thoughts of things, our desires, our actions;—what afore-time we disliked, we shall now esteem;—what we had no inclination to, we shall now eagerly covet;—and those actions which we have often condemned in others, we shall be guilty of ourselves.

That this is really true, and that such changes as these will certainly happen in every one of you, who shall be so unfortunate as to grieve the Holy Spirit so long till he forsakes you; you may learn from what happens almost every day.

Do not you see people that have been bred up in the Christian religion, and for some time have lived like orderly professors of Christianity;—do not you see them become as careless as if there were neither Religion, nor God, nor Heaven, nor Hell? Others become as much in love with wickedness as if they had had masters to have taught them.

Do not you see people of the same church, under the same pastors and teachers, having the same advantages of learning and parts, and yet some live orderly and like good Christians, and others run wild, as if they had been bred amongst infidels?

What is the reason of these strange differences? Why plainly this:—Those that suffer themselves to be governed by the Spirit of God, continue to be the children of God, and his Spirit watches over them for good;—and they that drive him away become like their father the devil, and his works they will do.

To fix this truth in your minds, take this one instance along with you. There is scarce one of you, (upon whom I have laid my hands this day) unless he be a very early sinner indeed, but at this time looks upon drunkenness to be a very bad sort of a vice. You wonder how people can drink when they are not thirsty,—what pleasure there can be in making themselves a laughing-stock to every sober body that sees them. But then, pray consider, that every man had the same thoughts of this vice as you now have, when he was of your age, and unacquainted with it. Not the most notorious drunkard, but once in his life was as sober, and was as little inclined to it, as you are this day.

From



From whence pray conclude, that a man's mind may alter, and that he may so live as to do those things hereafter which he now abhors.

The same may be said of all other sins. A youth who has not lived in a heathenish family, or in a heathenish town, has no more inclination to swear or curse, than he has to eat raw flesh;—his stomach rises when he hears an oath;—and he is as ready to hide himself from a curse, as if the person had power to inflict as well as to wish damnation. But after all, if this youth shall so far neglect himself, as for company's sake, or any other wicked purpose, to delight himself with the conversation of such people as mind not what they say or swear, it is great odds that he may become as bad as the worst of his companions. We see it often happens so. And what befalls another may, nay will, befall me, if once I am left to myself.

This consideration furnishes us with a true account of those horrid crimes which are too frequently committed in the world, and which even human nature startles at.

You wonder how a woman can be tempted to murder the child of her womb. You cannot imagine how people come to delight in blood, and make so light of it, as to kill a man for a trifle in comparison. But then you do not consider, that human nature, when once corrupt, is the same in all men. We are all subject to temptations; and if, by our repeated crimes, we should force the divine Spirit to leave us wholly in the power of the devil to manage, no man can tell, no man can foresee, what vile wickedness he shall at last be tempted to commit, nor what unthought-of end he may bring himself unto, while he goes from sin to sin, till he meets with destruction.

That this is a condition, that these are circumstances bad enough, you will easily be persuaded to believe. But yet the condition of those who continue to grieve the Spirit of God by a course of wickedness, has something in it more terrible. It is not only to be in a course of life which will lead me to ruin, if I continue in it, but it is to lie under very great difficulties of ever being reformed.

Most sinners propose to themselves some time or other to take up; but what is there in nature which is likely to bring that about? No man ever grew wiser, or more considerate, by continuing longer in the practice of vice. A man's conscience does not, by using to go against it, grow tenderer. On the contrary; every body may observe, that men grow more desperate, more careless, more hardened, the longer they go on

in a wicked course of life. This is the almost constant effect of wickedness continued in; and if some great sinners are by some extraordinary method of providence reclaimed, this is great mercy to those particular men; but this is not to be depended on. *We are not to sin, that grace may abound.* If men escape the dangers of the sea in a cock-boat, this does not, however, encourage others to take such a boat of choice, to make a voyage in.

In short; when men have discharged God out of their minds, by grieving him with their wicked lives, their circumstances are very sad; they neither do, nor delight in, that which is good, or safe, or praiseworthy; and, what is worse still, they are too likely never to return to sober reason. And that this is a terrible condition, every one of you sees without more arguments.

III. Let us then, in the third particular, consider, *What those things are, which so grieve the Holy Spirit as to force him to leave us to ourselves.* Pray take notice of what the Spirit of God saith in answer to this: "Whereas they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."

You see what is the first step to ruin. God puts into our minds good thoughts, good desires; inspires us with holy purposes; shews us the way we should take; checks us when we go wrong; corrects us if we be disobedient; in a word, "God speaks once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not." Thus far the Spirit of God bears with us.

But when once men begin to wish that their consciences would be quiet, that the Spirit of God would not speak to them;—when once they strive to quiet their consciences by running into still greater crimes, and are deaf to the soft whispers of the Holy Spirit of God;—then is that Spirit said to be grieved: And as a grieved person forsakes the thing which offends him, so the Spirit of God, if men still shut their ears, at last gives them up to a reprobate mind; that is, a mind void of judgment.

When the Holy Scripture speaks of wicked men, we have this expression or some such, in the account of them.—*They have not God before their eyes;—they have not God in all their thoughts;—they live without God in the world.* From whence, pray learn, *this great truth*, That when once a person begins to live and act without thinking often of God, he is then in the road to ruin.

That I may speak plain in a matter of such moment, my meaning is this:—When

\* Rom. i. 28.

a man



a man enters upon any business, though it be his ordinary business, without thinking thus with himself: Has not God forbidden me *this* thing;—has not God commanded me *that*? Is this fit for me to do as a man, as a Christian, as one accountable to God? Shall not I by this action injure my neighbour, whom God commands me to love as myself? Will the doing of such a thing be no dishonour to God? Will not my conscience, which is God's vicegerent within me, sometime reproach me for this?

He that does not ever and anon think thus with himself, will not long retain God in his knowledge, and then you remember what follows, God gives such men up to a reprobate mind.

IV. To prevent which, let me, in the last place, lay before you, *a method of living, which, by God's good blessing, may secure to you the comfort and continuance of his Holy Spirit.* The directions shall be very brief, and suitable to your capacities.

First; *Pray constantly to God for his direction, guidance, and blessing.* It is as impossible for a man to live a virtuous life without prayer, as it is to live long without food. It was a good saying of a great man, "Prayer will either make you leave off sinning, or sinning will make you leave off praying;" from whence conclude, that from that very day, when you begin to neglect praying to God, from that very day (if you take not up speedily) you may date your ruin.

Secondly; *Observe strictly the Lord's Day, to keep it holy.* Worldly business, or worldly pleasures, company, or diversions, may make one sometimes forget God; but he that resolves strictly to observe the duties of the Lord's Day, will by this means be brought to himself, and to his God, one day in seven, and that may sanctify him for the loss of the six days past. There is likewise a secret blessing that goes along with a conscientious observance of this day.

Thirdly; *Read every day some portion of the Holy Scripture,* though it be but a few verses, if business should indeed hinder you from reading more; particularly of the New Testament, which is able to make you wise unto salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. There is a certain blessing attends a diligent reading of Scripture, and men are enlightened at times, and by Scriptures, when they least expected information. A passage, a verse, a line of Scripture, has sometimes set men upon thinking, which has ended in a thorough reformation.

Fourthly; *Be diligent in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call you.*

"Slothfulness" (saith Solomon) "casteth

"into a deep sleep;" that is, it makes men as senseless, and as unconcerned, as men who are soundly asleep. Besides, idleness, or being out of a man's own calling, lays one open to the temptations of the devil. He has no business with a man who is doing what he should do; but idleness is a temptation to him to turn out of his way to try his skill and strength with you.

Fifthly; *Frequent good company, and those that fear God.* "As iron sharpeneth iron," so a man sharpeneth the countenance of "his friend;" so does the fear of God in others beget a fear of God in you. And take this for a rule, He that delights to be in the company of wicked men, whether it be for their wit, or learning, or any other advantage, that man is not truly good himself.

Sixthly; *Avoid all temptations to sin; all appearance of evil:* This is the Apostle's direction, and there is good reason for it; for can a man touch pitch, and not be defiled? Or can a man run into temptations, and be confident he shall get clear of them? Assure yourselves, you will meet with enough without seeking or playing with them; and instead of running into apparent danger, rather pray heartily, "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Lastly; *Endeavour to have these thoughts of God ever in your mind:*—That he is in every place, beholding the evil and the good;—that you are accountable to him for every thing you do;—that all your success depends upon him;—that even what we call our misfortunes come from him;—that present and future happiness is in his hands, to dispose of to those that serve him faithfully;—and that he ever respects the humble, and those that look to him for help and assistance.

These thoughts are grateful to God's Spirit; and while you have these, he will never be grieved or leave you to yourselves.

I have all this while been speaking to the younger sort; but you that are older may reap some benefit from what has been said.

You that have lived in the fear of God the greatest part of your lives, may, from what has been said, learn to whom it is you owe that comfort and blessing, even to the good Spirit of God, which has constantly watched over you for good.

You that have been in the ways of vice, and are by the Spirit of God reclaimed, you will observe what steps they were which led you into error, and how to please that Spirit, which alone, dwelling in you, can preserve you from falling into sin again.

<sup>a</sup> Prov. xix. 15.

<sup>a</sup> Prov. xxvii. 17.



And you also that are yet unreformed, may see what a condition you are in, and how hazardous your circumstances are.

To conclude:—Both young and old are concerned in these following inferences, which necessarily follow from what has been said.

*First*; That no person will continue at one certain pitch of wickedness, but either he must reform and be growing better, or he will still grow more vicious and depraved, while God suffers him to live. The reason is this:—We none of us act purely of ourselves, but all mankind are governed either by the Spirit of God, or by the power of the devil. Which ever of these two directs us, they will not suffer us to be idle. So long as the Spirit of God continues to rule in our hearts, we shall go from strength to strength, *as the Psalmist speaks*, till we become perfect, and out of the power of hell to touch us; and if we grieve the Holy Spirit, and force him away, then the Spirit of Darkness will not suffer us to be idle, but will find work enough to bring us to himself. For not only one ill habit begets another, but the more a man sins, the less capable he still makes himself of seeing what will be the end of his ways; and the motions and workings of God's Spirit have still less power upon him, till God quite forsakes him, till he fills up the measure of his iniquities, and till he meets with destruction.

And this brings us to a *second observation*, which is, that no man can be secure of himself who will continue in the practice of any known sin; nor can he be sure but that in time he shall fall into the most abominable wickedness.——No man can at first bring himself to do such ill things, as by degrees he will make easy to his mind and practice. Consider but the life of Solomon, as it is recorded in Scripture, the first part of which was so different from the last. What followed his strange depravity, you all learn from God's word:—His kingdom was divided, and a curse of ill manners entailed upon his posterity, which ended in the destruction of his kingdom.

It may just so happen to every man living, who knowingly and wilfully allows himself in any one thing which God and nature have made a vice; and there can be no security for any man, until he has, by the grace of God, so far gained upon himself

as to be willing and content to hear the voice of God within him, and resolve to be what God and his conscience tell him he should be.

At the very moment of our creation, God designed to govern us by his Spirit; for he made us creatures capable of going astray, and for that reason it was agreeable to his goodness to direct us himself; and direct us he will, till by our wilful sins we become too wicked for such a guide.

*Lastly*; God does never withdraw his Spirit from us while we continue fit for such a mercy, that is, while there are any hopes (and God knows it very well) whether his grace shall not still be abused and despised. The truth and goodness of God give us all the assurance imaginable of this; and every man's experience may satisfy him, that God leaves no methods untried, which may become a merciful Father, and just Creator, in order to bring his children and creatures to their duty and happiness.

But though a man may, from the good motions of God's Spirit, hope that he is still within the care of God; that God hath not yet given him up to a reprobate mind; yet he ought not to conclude, that therefore he may still go on in wickedness, and still hope that the same infinite love will evermore save him from ruin. For it is true, God doth wonderfully prevent us, and with great long-suffering bear with his creatures, while there is any hope of a reformation. But when that is over, when we have grieved the Spirit of God too long, and wearied his patience,—then followeth the sad state—*To be forsaken of God, and given over to a reprobate mind.*

The conclusion of the whole will be this:—That nothing but the preserving in your minds a sense and fear of God, can secure you from the foulest vices, from the crafts and assaults of the devil, from God's wrath, and from everlasting damnation.

As then we heartily pray to be delivered from these, we are bound to take great heed unto our ways, that we grieve not the good Spirit of God, and force him to leave us to be governed by our own reason and choices.

May that good Spirit defend us all by his heavenly grace, that we may continue his servants unto our lives end, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## S E R M O N LXXXVII.

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION.

OUR SAVIOUR'S CONCERN FOR THE COMMON PEOPLE, A PATTERN FOR HIS FOLLOWERS, AND ESPECIALLY FOR MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL.

M A T T H. ix. 36, 37, 38.

*But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest.*

**W**HEN the Son of God is moved with compassion, to be sure it is not without cause: And yet we find by experience, (such is our ignorance and the corruption of our nature) that *that very sight*, which caused compassion in him, is too often amongst men an occasion of contempt and disregard.

He could not behold the multitude but with concern and pity, and an earnest desire of having their case and misfortunes considered, and taken care of: While the generality of men (who by the providence of God are raised above the common people) are too apt to think the common people not worth so much concern as Jesus Christ would have bestowed upon them.

Without doubt then it must be for want of *knowing*, and being *thoroughly convinced* of, the danger the generality of the world is in, that we are not *all* more affected with their wants and sufferings.

For, verily, the condition of all people, who live without God in the world, is so *forlorn and miserable*, that if it were but well considered, what hazard they run, and what happiness they are like to lose, for want of using their best endeavours to attain it, we could not chuse but be moved with compassion, (as our blessed Saviour was) and strive, at least pray, with all our hearts, that God would raise up men to help them; *that he would send forth labourers into his harvest*, that he would *dispose* and *fit* men with qualifications to instruct the people in the ways of *truth and righteousness*.

Now, that what I am going to say to you may be *more edifying*, we shall consider, more particularly,

First; *The occasion of our Saviour's great concern.*

*Secondly; We shall see whether the same reasons for concern are not even now to be found amongst us? If so, then,*

*Thirdly; We shall have equal reason to be affected with pity and compassion, and cheerfully undertake the relief of such as are committed to our care. And, on the other hand,*

*Fourthly; The multitude, for whom we shall have a just compassion, will have reason to be very thankful for the concern we express towards them.*

And these are the particulars which (by God's good blessing) I shall now explain to you.

I. And first, we shall consider *the occasion of our Saviour's great concern and compassion*. The text saith, it was "because they fainted," or were tired and lay down, "and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd."

It is certain, that, to a mind *thoroughly awakened*, there is not a greater burthen than the *sense of that corruption of our nature* which is every moment leading us into rebellion against God. To know what is good, and not to be able to perform that good;—to know that we must all appear before the judgment-seat of God, and at the same time to know that our lives and actions will not bear to be enquired into;—to see "a law in our members warring against the law of our minds, and bringing us into captivity to the law of sin." This will make the stoutest heart cry out, "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?"

And this was the very case of the multitude which our Saviour beheld with compassion; and this was the reason of his concern:—They knew the Law, and *that the Law was holy, and the Commandments holy, just, and good*. They were sensible that their peace



peace depended upon the observance of that law; and that upon transgressing the law, their conscience would accuse them of guilt, and fill their souls with fears of what might come hereafter. And yet, at the same time, they found themselves under the power of a corrupt nature, strengthened by custom, which became a law to them,—*so that when they would do good, evil was present with them.*

In short; they found themselves under a law, which they could not in all points observe; and yet they knew that the Lawgiver expected an entire obedience.

This made them restless, like sheep without a shepherd;—this made their condition truly pitiable, and themselves the object of Christ's compassion.

This made Him with so much earnestness at another time invite them: "Come unto me all ye that travail, and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you,—and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

And lastly; it was this consideration which made Him, after so *affecting a manner*, recommend the case of his *scattered flock* to his *disciples*, and in *them*, to all *pastors of his Church*;—That *they* would, as *he had*, have compassion on them;—that they would (*as all good shepherds do*) look after their flock;—not leave them to themselves and their own choices,—not suffer them to *starve*, or *wander*, for want of food proper for them;—but with a merciful hand, helping their infirmities, and supplying all their wants.

II. And now, beloved, let us not fancy, that this was only *the case of people before the preaching of the Gospel*. It is plainly *our own case*; and *our own*, if possible, is more pitiable than *their's* was.

Let us but look abroad upon the multitude of Christians. How many there are, who know not why they are so;—how many, who know their duty, and yet, for want of being seasonably put in mind of it, *forget*, or *neglect* it;—how many, who have (as the Apostle speaks) *the form of godliness*, an outward shew, *but denying the power thereof*; that is, who do not live answerable to their outward profession.

Let us consider, How many there are who may have the *words*, but know little of the *meaning*, of the Principles of Christianity!—How many there are, who find themselves uneasy, and do not know why;—who suspect they are not safe, and yet know not what to do to be so!

Let us look further and see, How many have their very souls and affections so set upon this world, as not to think of a better;—how many, who are so pleased with the

delights of *this*, as to *despise* a better;—how many, who do not really know the hazard they run, or the danger they are in, by taking no more care of their souls!

And lastly; How many there are, who know so little of the happiness which God has prepared for them that love him, that they know not whether it is worth their while to look after it!

Let us (I say) consider these things, and say, Whether there is not as much reason *now*, as ever, for *compassion*? And then let us pray, that God would increase the number and the graces of his Ministers;—that God would give them a *true compassion*, that is, a just sense of the value of souls, and the reward of those that are instrumental in saving them.

III. And this will make us undertake the work of the ministry, and discharge it, with *Cheerfulness*, *Courage*, and *Constancy*; for a true compassion will make us do all this.

*First*; With *Cheerfulness*. "I conferred not," saith St. Paul, "with flesh and blood." No, truly; if he had done so, he would never have undertaken, or never have gone through, *the work of the ministry*. What then made him undertake so difficult a work? Why, a deep sense of the misery of man. He saw the *world lie in wickedness*; some unavoidably, and some wilfully blind;—some careless, and some desperate;—some seeking in vain for help, and others despising it;—when the *Lord of the harvest* touched his soul with such a compassion as made him resolve (having Christ for his example) to think no *trouble* too much, no *office* too mean, whilst he was doing good, and gaining souls out of the misery in which they were plunged.

And this is *that* which is stiled an *Inward Call*; which is such a disposition of the heart (wrought by the Spirit of God) as obliges a man, out of a sense of duty, and in hopes of doing good, to dedicate himself, and all his labours, to God's immediate service.

And truly, they that desire to come into the ministry, without considering, that it is an employment which obliges them to the *strictest virtue*, the *greatest patience*, the *meekest condescension*, and withal *continual labour* and *watchfulness*; they may very well doubt of *the truth of their call*.

*Secondly*; As a true compassion will make us undertake the work with cheerfulness, so it will enable us to go through the undertaking with *Courage*;—a very necessary qualification for a Minister of Christ. It is St. Paul's advice to Timothy: "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of  
" Jesus



"Jesus Christ." How much then do they forget themselves and their calling, who are afraid of men, who are afraid of difficulties, who are afraid of the issue of their labours?—Forgetting St. Paul's motto, "Not I, but the grace of God." A good servant, therefore, will be sure to do his duty, and leave the event in the hands of his great Master.

*Thirdly*; And as courage is, so is *Perseverance*, a necessary qualification for the ministry. "He that fleeth," whether from the danger of the wolf, or for want of temporal encouragements, to be sure "is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep." It is for want of that *compassion* which our great Master shewed for the multitude going astray, that people first enquire—not *what good can I do*, but—*What shall I get by the service?* And then the consequence is, *I will look to my gains, and let the service shift for itself.*

But this is not the way of such as fear God. They have other motives for undertaking the charge and cure of souls. They consider, how acceptable it must needs be in the sight of God, to spend their days in that very work, for the bringing which about Jesus Christ left the glories of Heaven, *to save men from death eternal.* See how the Prophet describes *him* long before his coming in the flesh: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

What is all this for, but to instruct those that are shepherds, how they are to behave themselves towards their flock; which are all to be carefully tended, as we hope for a reward from the great Shepherd, the Lord Jesus?

And can any of us see with what carefulness and concern a poor shepherd is employed about his flock? Seeking out their ailments, and proper cures for them: How he is pleased and rejoiced to find such as have gone astray; sparing no pains till he has found what he had lost. Can we see this, without reproaching ourselves?

For do we, with half that affection and application, look after our flocks;—seek for such as are astray in the ways of ignorance and impiety;—bring them back with gentleness;—concluding, that possibly they went wrong for want of knowing better, for want of being taken care of?

Verily, our Spiritual Flocks have their distempers, their weaknesses, are liable to accidents, to enemies, to death, as well as

our other flocks. And they must be attended, or they will perish, and we shall be accountable. So saith the Lord by the Prophet Ezekiel:<sup>d</sup> "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick; neither have ye bound up that which was broken; neither have ye brought again that which was driven away; neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them." Therefore, [ver. 10.] "I will require my flock at your hand." &c.

A matter very well worthy of all our consideration. For not only *our* future welfare, as well as *their's*, depends upon the care we bestow upon them *now*;—but even our present satisfaction and comfort, *in some measure*, depend upon the compassion we have for those committed to our care.

IV. For by this means, *the people, for whose safety we express so great concern, will at last be obliged in gratitude to be obedient and thankful to those that take care of them.*

We of the Clergy are apt to be uneasy when our people do not respect us as we think *with reason* they ought to do. Why now, the true way to cure people of this fault is, To endeavour to make them sensible of the *real concern*, the *unfeigned love*, we have for them;—to make them understand the *value of their souls*, which are committed to *our care*;—the *hazard* they are in without *our ministry*.

When once they perceive that our presence amongst them is necessary, and that our labours are really of advantage to them;—that they would be apt to forget themselves, their God, and the duty they owe to God and man, if they were not often called upon and put in mind of all these. If they do but once well understand, (and it is our business to make them understand) "that God is in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and hath committed unto us the Word of this Reconciliation:"<sup>e</sup> That therefore, as they hope for reconciliation and the favour of God, they will not despise *that ministry* which God has ordained. When once people know this, they will respect us for our *work's sake*,—for the sake of our office,—and for their own souls' sake;—and *we shall no longer have reason to complain* of their disregard either for our *persons* or *ministry*.

And certainly they that think our office and business is easy, and that we enjoy the benefit of their labours for nothing, will be convinced of their mistake, when they see us *faithful in discharging* the several duties of our calling. When they see us *thoughtful for their good*;—concerned to know their

<sup>b</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 3. <sup>c</sup> 1st. xl. 11.

<sup>d</sup> Chap. xxxiv. 4. <sup>e</sup> 2 Cor. v. 19.



several wants, and ready to help them;—*visiting the sick;—comforting the afflicted;—warning the unruly;—instructing the unlearned;—offending some by Christian reproofs;—disobliging others by not complying with their follies.* When they see what different sorts of people a Clergyman has to deal with;—that some are to be comforted, while others are to be terrified, with the judgments of God;—that some must of necessity be reproved before all, that others may fear; while others are to be warned and dealt with in private.

As these are thoughts enough to confound one who has this burthen upon him; (especially if he does not endeavour to acquit himself conscientiously) so these are considerations which will convince all thoughtful people,—*that God's Ministers do well deserve God's allowance, while they do his service as they are obliged.*

And now, beloved, you see whom you undervalue, when you disregard your pastor. One, who is *God's Minister*;—one, who is bound by his Master's example, *to have the most tender compassion for you*;—one, whose office it is, *to watch for your souls, for which he is accountable*;—one, who is appointed to declare unto you *the whole will of God.* Without whose ministry your children cannot enter into covenant with God, nor yourselves receive the blessed Sacrament, the seal of God's favour to man. In one word; without whose ministry you cannot hope to be acquitted before God, who (by his Son) has declared *to his Ministers*, “He that despiseth you, despiseth me, and God that sent me.”

As for ourselves, my brethren, God forbid that we should be of the number of those whom the Prophet Jeremiah<sup>f</sup> speaks of, “Their shepherds have caused them to go astray;”—or of those the Prophet Zechariah<sup>g</sup> mentions: “Their own shepherds pity them not.” Our great Master has set us another sort of example. And we shall follow his example, if we are indeed sensible of the condition of a soul *destitute of the grace of God.* We shall lament the condition of all such, we shall pity, we shall pray for them, and endeavour to rescue them out of the hands of the enemy. Above all, we shall strive to do this by our *good examples*, by lives as free as *may be* from the pollutions of the world.

<sup>f</sup> Chap. i. 6. <sup>g</sup> Chap. xi. 5.

It is true, it is a great mistake people run into, when they think that *a life of strict purity and holiness belongs only to the Clergy.* As if holiness were not to be the business of every one who hopes to see God in peace.

But thus much we may learn from this way of reasoning,—That a clergyman, who does not form his life *according to the rules of the Gospel*, of all men living must not hope to go to Heaven.

And though a man may be a true minister without these qualifications, (as a very villain may be an ambassador from a good King) yet the scandal would be so great, and the doom so heavy, that it is enough to startle even those that think they may not be of that number, and to make them jealous of their ways.

To conclude:—However well we may wish the work of the ministry to prosper; without the blessing of *the Lord of the harvest*, neither the wishes nor the endeavours of the labourers will prosper. For whatever parts or qualifications a man has, unless the Spirit of God incline and enable him to go through the work, he will by no means be equal to the burthen he undertakes.

Therefore, our Saviour not only bids us pray the Lord of the Harvest, to *send*, to *dispose*, to *qualify*, to *enable* the labourers, but prayed himself, and continued all night in prayer, for that purpose; by virtue of whose intercession the Church of God has hitherto been, and will to the end of the world be, supplied with Pastors and Teachers. But still it is our duty to pray for God's Good Spirit to go along with us.

The Holy Scriptures give us many instances of the power of this Spirit, when given to men designed for any office ordained of God. And truly, if we had not more reason to depend upon his guidance and blessing, than upon our own good wishes, or best endeavours, the work would go but very indifferently forward.

But Christ, who has commanded us *to feed his flock*, who has promised to “be with us unto the end of the world,” will, we hope and pray, bless our present undertaking, and all our labours.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.



## S E R M O N LXXXVIII.

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION.

## THE GREAT BLESSING OF A STANDING MINISTRY.

NUMB. vi. 22—27.

*And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And they shall put my name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.\**

**T**HAT which I purpose to do at this time, good Christians, is to lay before you THE GREAT BLESSING OF A STANDING MINISTRY;—that you may know how to value so great a blessing, and be thankful to God for it;—that you may not be tempted by a wicked world to despise God's Ministers;—but that you may reap all the benefit of *their* prayers, whom God has appointed to pray for you, and to bless you; and whose prayers for you, he has promised to hear, if you do not make yourselves unworthy of his blessing.

I have taken a text out of the Law of Moses. It is the solemn blessing with which the priests dismissed the congregation by God's own appointment. The Christian church uses the same blessing in effect. They both recommend the people to God's blessing and protection.

THE LORD BLESS THEE, AND KEEP THEE; that is, preserve and keep thee from all evil; THE LORD MAKE HIS FACE TO SHINE UPON THEE, by delivering thee out of all thy troubles; AND BE GRACIOUS UNTO THEE, in pardoning thy sins, and passing by thine iniquities: THE LORD LIFT UP THE LIGHT OF HIS COUNTENANCE UPON THEE, or make thee glad and joyful; AND GIVE THEE PEACE, that is, all manner of prosperity.

And then, that the people might not imagine this to be only an empty ceremony, without any real effect, God assures them, that when his priest thus blesses them in his name, *that he will bless them according to the blessing pronounced over them.* And in the antient prayers of the Greek church, the people answered, THE LORD KEEP YOU, SIR, TO BLESS AND SANCTIFY US MANY YEARS; to shew how sensible they were of

the benefit of receiving God's blessing by his minister.

And this is what I would endeavour to make *you* sensible of; that is, of THE GREAT BLESSING OF A STANDING MINISTRY.

And this I shall do, by setting before you, *in order*, the work of a Minister of God; that you may know how much his Ministers contribute to your Salvation; and that you may esteem them accordingly.—But I must first shew you by what authority they act.

Now, the design of the Christian Religion being to restore mankind to the Mercy and Favour of God, from which we are sadly fallen, it pleased God to send his only Son, to instruct us in the true and only way of becoming holy, that we might be capable of being happy. This he did in his own person while he continued upon earth; but being to return to Heaven, he gave authority to his Apostles and to their successors, to finish the work which he had begun; that is, to preach the Gospel to all succeeding generations, that the world might have an opportunity of knowing the good pleasure of God, and what men must do to be saved.

The power and commission which Christ gave them, is well worth your hearing with the greatest attention. You will find it in the xxviii<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Matthew, and at the 18<sup>th</sup> verse; and it is as follows:—Jesus, speaking to his Apostles, said unto them, “All power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth;” that is, in *Heaven* to send down the Holy Ghost to guide you into all truth; and in *Earth*, to establish a spiritual kingdom there. “Go ye, therefore, and make disciples to me in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;

“teaching

\* See Exod. xxviii. 29. Deut. x. 8. Joel ii. 16. Eccus. i. 21, 22. 2 Chron. xxx. 27. Luke iv. 5. 2 Cor. iii. 6. v. 18. Heb. xiii. 17. James v. 14.



“teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And lo!” that is, let the world take notice of it, “lo, I am with you,” I, who have all power in Heaven and Earth, “I am with you,” am present with you in the work of your ministry, both to prosper your labours, and to protect your persons, “unto the end of the world;”—*with you*, while you live, and with your successors after your death.

The Apostles having received this commission for themselves and their successors, they immediately set about the work of the ministry; declaring to all nations, “That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them.” And that “he had committed unto them,” to them and to their successors, “the Word of Reconciliation;” that is, he has committed unto them the preaching of the Gospel, upon the receiving and obeying of which God will be reconciled to mankind.<sup>b</sup>

So that you see very plainly, that our salvation depends, under God, upon the ministry of those whom Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost have appointed *to reconcile men to God*.

Jesus Christ knew very well to what a perverse world he sent them: he knew likewise that they were *men*,—men of like passions with those to whom he sent them; and therefore, to guard them and his own authority, as much as may be, from contempt, and to oblige the world to hear them with reverence, he declares,<sup>i</sup> that he will look upon himself as injured, in the contempt any man shews to *his* ministers; and that in them God is heard, or despised. “He that heareth you, (saith our Lord) heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me; and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.”

This is one of the blessings of a **STANDING MINISTRY**. We have men commissioned by Jesus Christ, who stand obliged to teach nothing but what they have learned from him, *what he has commanded them*; who are under the conduct of his Spirit; and who have the Promise of Christ to be present with them in the exercise of their ministry.

We now come to consider, **IN WHAT THEIR MINISTRY CONSISTS**. And, in the *first place*, as stewards over the house of God, (for so they are called) their duty is to receive into his household and family, which is his church, all such as are capable or desirous of becoming members thereof; and this they do by the Sacrament of Baptism, appointed by Christ himself for that end;

by which they are put into the way of salvation. This is another blessing of a Standing Ministry, and it will appear to be a very great one, when it is considered, that *this* power was committed, by Christ himself, to his Apostles and to their successors, as you heard in the commission given to them, and just now read to you.

In the next place, the work of the Ministry consists in *preaching the Gospel*; that is, in convincing men that they are sinners; that as such, they stand in need of God’s mercy; for that a day is coming when God will call all men to an account, and judge them according to their works,—that their works will be judged good or evil, as they agree with the Gospel, or are contrary to it.

Now, it is the duty of a Minister of God to *study the Gospel*, that he may be able to declare what it *commands*, and what it *forbids*,—to put Christians in mind of their duty, which they are but too apt to forget;—to exhort them to follow it, and to rebuke them when they walk contrary to it;—to set before them the terrors of the world to come, when they see them careless and unconcerned;—and to comfort them with the mercies of God in Jesus Christ, whenever they are afflicted with the burthen of their sins. Who does not see *the great blessing of such a ministration*?

But this is not all. Christians are subject to sin, to forfeit the favour of God, to make themselves liable to his anger both here and hereafter. What must they do to escape the wrath to come? Why, Jesus Christ has ordained a Sacrament of Reconciliation, and has appointed his Ministers the dispensers thereof, to all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto God; by which their pardon is sealed, and their graces increased. Is this a blessing to be despised?

But besides this, the Ministers of Christ, as the Priests had under the Law, have a daily charge upon them: They stand obliged, either publicly or in private, to offer to God the prayers of the church in behalf of their own flock;—to confess their own sins, and the sins of their people;—to give God thanks for the mercies he bestows upon them;—to beg his protection and his blessing upon them, and upon their labours. And he must sure be a person of a profane spirit, who does not think this a very great blessing indeed.

Whatever little esteem Christians may have for the Ministers of Christ while they are in health, and at ease, yet whenever it pleases God to visit them with sickness, or any grievous affliction, they will then be apt to value their Pastor, and think his presence

<sup>b</sup> 2 Cor. v. 19.<sup>i</sup> Luke x. 16.



fence and his help necessary. The *afflicted* will want words of comfort, to support their dejected spirits, as well as direction how to bear, and how to profit by, their troubles. And they that are sick, and have any faith in God's Word, will, as St. James advises, send for the Minister of God, that he may pray over him, that he may examine the sincerity of his faith, and his repentance, and that, if he is truly penitent, he may receive absolution, which the Spirit of God assures him shall have a real effect. "If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him."<sup>k</sup>

These are they, by whose ministry you are made Christians;—they, to whom the care of your souls is committed;—who have Christ's commission to teach you, to pray for you, and to bless you in his name;—to reconcile you to God, and God to you. They are (as St. Paul calls them, 1 Cor. iv. 1.) "They are stewards of the mysteries of God;"—dispensers of his merits, and his graces to his elect. By whom he *instructs* them in the truth;—*feeds* them with the Bread of Life;—by whom he *comforts* afflicted souls, *absolves* the penitent, *arms* them against the fear of death, and *fits* them for a blessed eternity.

In one word;—the Ministers of the Gospel, and the Ordinances to them intrusted, are the ordinary means, by which God does *teach, edify, bless, and save* his people. To whom the true, THE EVERLASTING COVENANT OF PEACE, (mentioned Numbers xxv. 13.) THE COVENANT OF AN EVERLASTING PRIESTHOOD, is committed. A priesthood that must continue (for so Jesus Christ assures us) as long as this world lasts.

Let me only add the character which our blessed Lord gave his Ministers, in the persons of his Apostles: "Ye are the Salt of the Earth;" that is, they are designed by God to preserve the world, as much as may be, from corruption, (as salt does other bodies) and by that means hindering the judgments of God from falling upon them.

Thus I have set before you, a few of the MANY BLESSINGS OF A STANDING MINISTRY. It is true, these blessings would be more visible, if every Minister of God would do what his duty requires of him, and what he promised at his ordination.

If Godly Discipline were restored and countenanced;—if none were admitted into holy orders, but such as are qualified and likely to be an honour to God and to religion;—if men would not take upon them to convert others, until they themselves are converted;—if men would undertake the Holy Calling out of true love for God and

for the souls of men;—if such as have taken the cure of souls would, with faithful diligence, *preach the Word, visit the sick, prepare dying persons for the account they are going to give;—if their Sermons were plain and practical*, and always aimed at the necessities and the salvation of those that hear them;—if they would always *administer the Sacraments* with great devotion, *doing holy things after an holy manner*;—and every morning and evening, as they are enjoined, offer the sacrifice of prayers and thanksgiving for their whole flock, that God may bless them and their labours, and deliver them from evil. In short; if they would endeavour to preserve the *power* as well as the *form* of godliness; and take care that the ministry be not blamed through any liberties they take;—This, I say, would contribute very much towards the convincing all well-disposed Christians that A STANDING MINISTRY IS ONE OF THE GREATEST OF BLESSINGS.

But after all, the personal failings of Ministers do not make void the commission which they have received from God TO BLESS HIS PEOPLE IN HIS NAME. We know that Judas himself was sent by Christ with a commission to preach the Gospel; and we have no reason to doubt but that he did it with effect. We know that a civil magistrate is to be obeyed and honoured, *because he has authority from above*, let him be never so irregular in his private life. It is the *commission*, the *power*, the *business* he is sent about, and the *authority which sends him*, which we are to consider, and not the failings of the man.

And, as no man in his senses would despise a pardon for his life, because he does not like the messenger that brings it; even thus absurd is it, to overlook and despise *the Word of Peace*,—the Sacraments of Reconciliation,—the prayers, the blessing, of a Priest, an ambassador of the Most High God, because he is poor, or not very learned, or because he has failings like other men.

Be assured of it, therefore, good Christians, if you, on your part, do not hinder God's graces and blessings from falling upon you, God will vouchsafe them to you, upon the prayers of his Ministers. "When you go into an house," saith our Lord to his Apostles, "salute it;" that is, beg that God's blessing may be upon it; "and if a son of peace be there," that is, any one desirous to hear the truth, and to do the will of God, "your peace," that is, the peace and blessing of God, "shall rest upon him;" if not, "it shall turn to you again." Here is a certain effect promised upon the blessing prayed for by God's minister; as sure to the *eye of faith*, as any thing that is visible to the *bodily eye*.

When

<sup>k</sup> James v. 14.

<sup>l</sup> Matth. v. 13.



When people do not edify under those whom the providence of God has set over them, they are but too apt to lay the blame on the Minister of God; either because he wants abilities, or has some failings. They imagine that the ordinances, in his hands, have not that influence which they might otherwise hope for. But humility should oblige them rather to fear that the fault may be in themselves, and that if God denies them his graces, it is because of some secret or known sin which they indulge, and will not part with. Besides, it generally happens, that the *same ministrations* have their saving effects upon some, while others are no way bettered by them. For as the same sun hardeneth clay, and melteth wax, so the *same ministrations* do only serve to increase the guilt of some, while they become effectual means of salvation to others.

THEY THAT WERE DISPOSED FOR ETERNAL LIFE, (saith St. Luke) BELIEVED; while others REJECTED THE COUNSEL OF GOD for their good, and perished for want of faith. Both had the same Gospel preached unto them, and the same offers of salvation.

I know it is with difficulty that people will believe, that their eternal salvation can depend upon the ministration of a man like themselves. But so most certainly it is. It depends, *by the appointment of Jesus Christ*, upon *Baptism*, administered by a man like ourselves, but having authority from God;—it depends upon the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*, after relapse into sin, and this administered by a man like ourselves,—even as much as the lives of the children of Israel, when bitten by serpents, depended upon looking upon the *brazen serpent* set up by Moses;—or as much as the stopping of the plague depended upon Aaron, the Priest of God, his burning of incense.

And though there is no question to be made of it, but God can dispense with his own ordinances, when he thinks fit, and save a sincere soul without them; yet it is *as sure*, he will not save such as despise his ordinances, or wilfully neglect to make use of them.

In short; let men be never *so great*, never *so learned*, never *so knowing*, never *so good* in their own eyes, they must receive the blessing of God by the hands of his own Ministers. He will save men in his own way; and will be glorified in making use of weak instruments, to bring about the greatest works;—will make use of frail men to destroy the power and kingdom of Satan, and to bring men to Heaven.

“We have this treasure,” (saith the Apostle)<sup>a</sup> “we have this treasure in earthen

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 7.

vessels, that the excellency of the power “may be of God, and not of man;” that is, that such as shall receive the Gospel may be convinced, that their conversion was the work of God, and not of man; and that such as administered the means of salvation might not proudly ascribe the success to themselves, but unto God.

And God did most surprisingly confound *the wisdom of the wise*, at the first preaching of the Gospel, by bringing about, through the *foolishness of preaching*, (as the same Apostle speaks) that which all the learned world, by their great wisdom, were not able to do.

And, indeed, God’s great design in the Gospel is, to HUMBLE MEN, that they may be convinced, that they owe every thing to Him, and to Him alone. He therefore sent his Son in the *form of a servant*, that he might bring down the high minds of the proud. The same Son of God made choice of his Apostles out of the lowest condition of life, to teach and instruct the *great*, the *wise*, and the *learned* men of the world. He appointed *these* and their successors to be the messengers and ministers of salvation to the greatest men on earth. The doctrines these preached were the most strange, and the most unwelcome to flesh and blood. Such as these; that the salvation of men depended upon the believing in Christ crucified, in renouncing of our own wisdom, in mortification, and self-denial.

And as his *Ministers* made no great appearance *to the eye of flesh*; no more did the *means* be ordained for conveying his favours and blessings to men.

He appointed them to be baptised with water FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS:—He vouchsafed especial gifts and graces of his Spirit, by the LAYING ON OF THEIR HANDS:—He appointed a Sacrament of Reconciliation, consisting of BREAD AND WINE, which, being given and received with faith in him, should be a sure pledge of *their* pardon and salvation, who devoted themselves to his service.

Lastly; He appointed *his* ministers, not the ministers of earthly princes, nor the princes themselves, to receive into his church and kingdom such as they should deem worthy, and to turn out the unworthy; with this assurance, “That what they should “bind on earth, should be bound in heaven; and what they should loose on earth, “should be loosed in heaven.”<sup>n</sup>

To despise, therefore, the Word and Sacraments, the Blessings and Favours of God, because they are offered to us through the hands of the meanest of men, is plainly to

<sup>n</sup> Mark xviii. 18.

despise



despise our own salvation. And if there are any so unhappy as to carry their folly and prejudices so far as to look upon the means of salvation, which God has appointed, as unnecessary, or not likely to convey his blessings and graces to them, there is no help for it; they must undoubtedly perish.

We know that there are people, who are very confident that they can do well enough without *these ministrations*;—that they can read and understand the Bible, and their duty, without a teacher;—that if they are morally good, just in their dealings, sober in their lives, and kind to their neighbours, this is what God will be pleased with. “What doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”

This is certainly true, if rightly understood. But then let it be remembered, that this was spoken to the people of Israel, who had *Priests*, and *Sacraments*, and *Sacrifices*, and *Ordinances*, as well as Christians. And if an Israelite should have pretended to be just, and merciful, and to walk humbly with God, without *circumcision*, without *sacrifice*, and other Ordinances of the Law, that soul would have been cut off,—he would have been rejected of God and man.—Every body that reads the Bible must see this.

And indeed, what the Prophet intends by these words is, to blame those Israelites who placed all their religion in observing the outward ordinances, and took no care of the inward man, or of those duties of justice, mercy, and the love of God, which all these ordinances aimed at.

So we say, that *holiness of life* is that which God requires as the principal thing, *without which no man must see the Lord*. But then we are sure, that this holiness consists, *first*, in OBEDIENCE TO GOD,—in submitting to what he has appointed in order to make us holy,—in hearing, and submitting to *his* ministers, who are appointed for the edifying of the church;<sup>p</sup>—in receiving the Sacraments, the means of grace, at their hands;—and in obeying their godly admonitions.

And lastly, and which is the great thing aimed at by all these ordinances, *in leading a life becoming the servants of God*.

This, we are sure, is God's ordinary way of bringing men to holiness, in order to their happiness. For we are not here saying any thing of what God *can* do if he please; or how he will deal with those who are destitute of these means of salvation; but we speak of Christians who are *blessed with a Standing Ministry*, and who enjoy the means of salvation *by them administered*.

<sup>o</sup> Micah. vi. 8.    <sup>p</sup> Eph. iv. 12.

And we must not wonder, that the world continues still so bad, notwithstanding *this blessing of a Standing Ministry*. Thus it was, even when our Lord and his Apostles preached the Gospel. Many would not hear;—many heard, but laid it not to heart;—many suffered the cares, and riches, and pleasures of the world, to choak the seed, so that it brought no fruit to perfection. And so it will be to the end of the world. All that continue to grieve the Holy Spirit, by which they have been sanctified,—their unimproved graces will be taken from them,—they will become again the Subjects of Satan, and be led by him captive at his will.

But after all, and as bad as the world is, we may be sure of it, it would be much worse, were there no standing Ministers of God, to put men in mind of their duty and of their danger. God, his *Word*, his *Sabbaths*, and his *Laws*, would soon be forgotten, as they have been by the whole Heathen world.

And now, good Christians, do not imagine, that it is for *our own sakes*, but for *your's*, THAT WE THUS MAGNIFY OUR OFFICE, as St. Paul speaks.<sup>q</sup> It is, that *you* may know what a blessing you enjoy,—that you can *hear God's Word*, and *know his Will*, and *partake of his Ordinances*, and *receive his Blessing*, by the hands of his own ministers;—and that you may be sensible of the danger of despising so great salvation,—of thinking yourselves too wise to be taught by the meanest of God's Ministers, or too good to be blessed and prayed for by the most unworthy of his servants.

And be assured of it, that they who despise God's Ministers will at last despise the Gospel of Christ. This we are sure of from experience, as well as from Christ himself; and when this sin becomes general, it is a sure forerunner of destruction.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Pastors, was despised and rejected of men, even of his own people. And what followed? Why, that whole nation was in a short time *rejected*, and became slaves to all the nations of the world.

Under the Law, God shewed his displeasure and his judgments, in many instances, against such as either *invaded the Priesthood*, or *despised his Ministers*. The Jews lived more by *sight* than by *faith*, and they were visibly punished for their profaneness.

We who live under a better constitution, who are to believe things invisible, and TO WALK BY FAITH, should remember, that the punishments of the next life are much more severe than those inflicted upon finners in this world.

<sup>q</sup> Rom. xi. 13.



Our Saviour saith expressly, that *their* condition, who reject his Gospel and his Ministers who publish it, "That it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for them."

And the same Lord Christ has declared it to be the crime of an Heathen, of one who believes not in God, to despise the sentence and judgment of the Church and her Governors in things of a spiritual nature.

The Spirit of God commands you, as Christians, "to esteem the Ministers of Christ very highly for their works' sake." "For they watch for your souls, as they that must give an account." And St. John gives this distinguishing mark of the Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error: "He that knoweth God, heareth us; (that is, Christ's lawful Ministers) and he that is not of God, heareth not us."

And now, Christians, having endeavoured to make you sensible of the *very great blessing of a Standing Ministry*, I shall conclude the whole with a few useful observations. The first shall be in the words of an eminent Jew, (Maimonides) "Do not say what availeth the blessing of this simple Priest; for the blessing depends not on him, but upon the Most Holy God." Do not, therefore, mistake and think, that when the Minister of God prays for you, or blesses you, or administers to you the ordinances of God, that he does it as an ORDINARY, PRIVATE PERSON. No; he does it as *God's Minister*,—as one *authorised to bless you* with sure effect, if it be not your own fault. Who does it, as St. Paul speaks, IN THE PERSON, or place, OF CHRIST.

You see, therefore, the *profaneness* of those who would prostitute the ordinances of God, and would make them, and the ministers of Christ, contemptible. They do not consider the *presumption* it would be to take upon themselves to administer Sacraments; that is, to *seal Covenants* betwixt God and men, without any commission from God;—to take upon themselves to be the *Ministers of Reconciliation*, to *reconcile men unto God*, and *God to man*;—to *bless* in his name, and to pre-

tend to *obtain graces and blessings* from God to his people.

To proceed:—If then you really value the prayers, the blessing of God's Ministers, you will respect their persons and their office. And when you remember that they are *God's Ministers*, you will conclude, that the Master is always dishonoured, when his servants are slighted. And most certainly, he that despises a Minister of Christ, would have done so by Christ himself, when he was on earth; "He was despised and rejected of men," by such men as those who despise his ministers.

Has the Christian Religion any thing in it that is ridiculous? Is the Christian Ministry a ridiculous institution? No, sure. Why then do so many take pleasure in hearing them ridiculed? Why, the secret is this: Their lives being corrupt, they cannot but wish in their hearts, that there were no truth in religion; and that the Ministers of Christ, who stand bound by their office to put them in mind of that terrible judgment, which, without a true repentance, will one day be pronounced upon them:—they use their utmost endeavours, that these Ministers of Christ may be *despised, discredited*, and set at naught, and that they may sin without rebuke.

*Lastly*; If the Priest, the Minister of God, blesseth *with a real effect*, all those that repair to the Church to receive God's blessing, how unhappy are they, who are *shut out of the Church* for their crimes, and consequently are deprived of the blessing of God! And how unhappy are all they who deprive themselves of this blessing, by *absenting* themselves from the public assemblies of Christians!—Little do Christians consider what they lose by doing so.

And now, good Christians, I cannot end this discourse better than by *pronouncing that blessing*, in the name of Christ, which I made choice of for a text:—"The Lord bless you, and keep you;—the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you;—the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace, now and evermore." Amen.

<sup>1</sup> 1 Thess. v. 13. <sup>2</sup> Heb. xiii. 17. <sup>3</sup> 1 John iv. 6.



## S E R M O N LXXXIX.

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION.

## RECIPROCAL OBLIGATIONS OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS AND THEIR PEOPLE.

H E B. xiii. 17.

*They watch for your souls, as they that must give an account.\**

**H**ERE are two sorts of hearers greatly concerned in these words;—*Christian Pastors*, and the *people of their flock*. The *first* have very great reason to be concerned for the account they must one day give of the souls of those that are committed to their care. And the *second* should consider, how much they owe to the good providence of God, for appointing his own Ministers, under the most strict obligations, TO WATCH FOR THEIR SOULS; and what account *they* also must give, if they have not profited by their Pastor's care.

And may that Holy Spirit, who has given us this warning, enable me to speak upon these *two particulars*, so as to edify both myself and you that hear me; for we are all of us, you see, concerned in an account we must give to God,—that we may have *this account* very much in our minds.

We shall begin with the account we ourselves are to give of the souls committed to our care. And what Bishop, what Priest, what Minister of God, can seriously think of this without trembling?

Many are the duties of our sacred calling; many are the temptations we meet with to neglect them. The mischiefs that follow such neglect are many and great; and the punishment, without repentance and amendment, to be dreaded above all things.

These are, indeed, very great discouragements for any man to undertake so great a charge; but then the reward of a faithful discharge of these duties will be so very great, (as the Holy Spirit assures us)—and the helps so certain,—and the advantages so many,—and the occasions of glorifying God, and of doing good to the souls of men, will be such,—as one, who loves God, would be thankful to be made an instrument in so glorious a work, notwithstanding the trouble that will attend it.

We will first consider the ends for which men are ordained to the ministry, that they

themselves, and all Christians, may see the great blessing they enjoy, who live under a godly ministry.

They are ordained for these great ends:—

To preserve the knowledge of the true God amongst men, which is entirely lost amongst so many heathen nations.

They are appointed to make Jesus Christ and his Gospel, and the goodness and mercy of God manifested therein, known unto men.

They are to keep men's consciences awake, by setting before them the certainty, and the terrors, of a judgment to come.

They are to convince men of the great corruption of our nature; and that we must be converted, and become new creatures, before God will take any pleasure in us;—

And that this life is the only time allotted us for this work, to be restored to the image of God by a true conversion, by a true and sincere repentance, and by works meet for repentance.

Now, the way they are appointed by God to do these things is,

*First*; By their *Sermons* and other pious *instructions*;—

*Secondly*; By their good *Examples*;—

*Thirdly*; By a *Godly Discipline*;—and

*Lastly*; By their *Prayers*.

*First*; By their *Sermons* and other pious *Instructions*.—A Minister of Jesus Christ ought very seriously to think of the complaint God made: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge." This, God knows, may be said of too many Christians: They perish, for want of knowing—the bondage of man by sin,—the manner of our redemption by Jesus Christ,—and the power of God's grace to deliver us:—Subjects which can never be insisted on too often.

<sup>1</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. iv. 6.

\* See Luke vi. 39. x. 20. John x. 11. xvii. 16. 1<sup>st</sup> Cor. i. 1. 2<sup>nd</sup> Cor. vi. 3. 1<sup>st</sup> Thess. v. 13. 1<sup>st</sup> Tim. iv. 14, 16. Deut. 33. 11. Eccles. vii. 29.



On the other hand, Sermons will be of little or no use, if they are not plain, and suited to the *necessities*, and to the *capacities*, of the people to whom we preach, and if they tend not to the salvation of their souls;—either to humble, and cast them down, under the sense of the danger they are in on account of their sins;—or to raise them up, by letting them see the necessity and comfort of closing with the terms and promises of the Gospel. To such sermons as these it is that God gives his blessing.

St. Paul<sup>x</sup> mentions another way of teaching, which, to be sure, he found the blessed effects of; “he taught from house to house,” as well as in the church. And certainly, a private instruction very often makes the deepest impression upon the minds of men; and, in many cases, may be of more use than ten sermons.

The next way by which a Minister of God is to teach his people is—BY HIS GOOD EXAMPLE. “Ye are,” saith our Lord to his disciples, “Ye are the salt of the earth.” What is the meaning of this? Why, it is to keep others from corruption, as salt does the things that are liable to be corrupted and spoiled.

It was for this reason the Apostle enjoins Titus,<sup>y</sup> to shew himself in all things a pattern of good works.

Sermons, though never so good, are not always understood or minded, by common people; but a good, a sober, a pious life and example, is a language that every body understands.

How often doth our Lord, in his last prayer for his disciples, repeat these words: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” But to teach his Ministers how different their lives ought to be from the lives of worldly people;—that they should avoid not only scandalous sins, (for then they are plainly Ministers of Satan) but all that is offensive, vain, trifling, and useless,—every thing that is unbecoming the character of a Minister of Jesus Christ.

DISCIPLINE, in the next place, is another means which God hath put into the hands of his Ministers, in order to keep men from ruining themselves and others.

It is true, no man can be forced to forsake his sins and be converted. But when men become careless of their own salvation, the church owes this care to her children, to hinder them as much as possible from corrupting others, and leading them to hell. And a Minister of God doth in some measure become guilty of those sins, which he doth

not hinder by all means becoming the Spirit of the Gospel.

And if people would but consider the ends of Church Discipline, it would be matter of joy and thankfulness, that God has appointed his Ministers to take especial care of this matter; for the ends of discipline are,—To endeavour to convert sinners, that their souls may be saved;—to hinder the plague of wickedness from spreading;—and that the judgments of God upon the land may be prevented by the repentance of its inhabitants,—and that God in all things may be glorified.

But if, instead of seeing these good ends of Church Discipline, people will be uneasy and angry, when they are called to an account, and rebuked for crimes which would otherwise ruin them,—and the Ministers of Christ looked upon as their mortal enemies;—they must know, that just so the devil treated Christ himself, when he commanded him to leave the man whom he had taken possession of; “What have I to do with thee,” said he to our Lord, “art thou come to torment me?”

In one word:—If Baptism be accounted a blessing, Church Discipline is so too,—they being both appointed by the same Spirit of God, by the same author of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>z</sup>

And Christians would do well to think of it, That not to shew their dislike and abhorrence of every thing that may offend God, or injure our neighbour, is to join in the sin, and in the guilt that attends it; which every man doth, who converses with wicked men without scruple. They harden the sinner, and hazard their own salvation.

Now, God having lodged a power in the Pastors of the church, to prevent as much as is in their power the growth of wickedness, it is their duty to do this; that is, as was said before, *by all means becoming the Spirit of the Gospel*;—by exhortation,—by reproof,—by rebukes, private and publick,—by denying them the publick worship;—and, when none of these methods will reform them, by shutting them out of the church, and the communion of the faithful, by a solemn excommunication.

And no Christian must say, that he values and loves the church of Christ, or Christ himself, when he opposeth this authority of her Pastors, and the discipline which he himself has appointed; nor must any Minister of Christ think himself excused from remissness in this duty, by the opposition he may meet with;—we being all answerable for the wickedness occasioned by the neglect

<sup>x</sup> Acts xx. 20. <sup>y</sup> Chap. ii. 7.

<sup>z</sup> Matth. xviii. 15.



of this means of grace, and ought to consider, that we have more souls besides our own to answer and account for.

To these means of grace there is another, never to be forgot or omitted; and this is, the duty of *praying daily* for a *blessing* upon our labours, and upon our flock, and upon all other means of grace and salvation. Without this we shall be forced, when we come to die, to use the words of St. Peter to our Saviour:<sup>a</sup> "We have toiled all the "night," all our lives, "and have taken "nothing."

Grace we cannot give: That is the gift of God, and must be prayed for. We must pray, therefore, for his grace and blessing—upon our studies,—upon our sermons,—upon ourselves, that we may be living examples of all the graces and virtues which we recommend to others. We must pray for a blessing upon the discipline of the church;—for sinners, that they may be converted;—for such as are in error, that they may see the truth;—and that God may increase the number, and the graces, of such as love and fear him. And we should never forget to pray, that God may bless the persons of all those, who by their own labours do minister to our necessities.

And let us remember, that this was a most especial charge and duty upon the priests under the law of Moses. A morning and evening sacrifice was appointed to be offered, for every soul in Israel, who through necessity, distance of place, or sickness, could not attend upon the Temple Service; pursuant to which, our church has laid the same charge upon her Ministers, as every Clergyman knows who consults her canons and rubricks.

And when people are satisfied, that their Pastors do pray for God's Blessing upon them, their families, and labours, (*without which, all their labours will be to little purpose*) they will not be so apt to grudge them that fruit and recompence of their labours, which God and the laws have assigned them.

I said indeed, that *all their labours, without God's blessing, will be to little purpose*; and I had God's authority for saying so. Do but consult the first chapter of the prophet Haggai; there the Lord tells the Jews, that they had sown much and brought in little; and that he that earned wages, put it into a bag with holes, because the house and service of God was neglected.

And the Lord, by Malachi his Prophet,<sup>b</sup> challenges the people to try him, his power, and goodness: "Bring ye," saith ye, "all "the tythes into my store-house, that my

"service may be kept up; and prove me, if  
"I will not open the windows of Heaven,  
"and pour you out a blessing, that there  
"shall not be room to receive it."

We know very well what unthoughtful people are ready to say to this, *That this is preaching for ourselves*: But it is really preaching for them, and for their benefit, or else this Bible which I have in my hand is not the Word of God.

We shall, therefore, now go on to consider, what encouragement a *Minister of Christ* has to go on in the way of his duty, notwithstanding all outward discouragements he may meet with.

And, indeed, one great happiness it is for a Minister of God, that the duties he promiseth to perform will help to change his heart, and create in him those dispositions which will make him faithful to his great Master.—For example:—

He promises to read the Holy Scriptures daily. He will then have daily before his eyes, the *example*, the *instructions*, and the *precepts* of Jesus Christ,—the rewards and punishments of the life to come.

When he instructs the youth in the catechism of the church, he will be obliged to let them see how far we are fallen from grace, and what pains we must take to be restored to the image of God, as ever we hope to be saved;—and when he doth this to any saving purpose, he cannot but be convinced, how much he himself is concerned in so necessary a work, and change of heart and life.

It will be impossible to converse with poor and needy people, as he will be obliged to do, without partaking of that Spirit of Jesus Christ, who went about doing good,—without being meek and humble, as knowing, that if any one of us are in better circumstances than another, it is purely the gift of God, and for the benefit and good of others.

When he reads Divine Service with devotion, he will beget devotion in himself, as well as in those that hear him.

When his Sermons are plain and practical, they will necessarily affect his own heart, as well as the hearts of his hearers.

Every child he baptiseth will put him in mind of the vows that are upon himself.

And the administration of the Lord's Supper cannot be performed as it ought to be, without filling his soul with holy and devout thoughts, as well as with an holy fear, lest he should offer the prayers of the faithful with polluted lips, or distribute the bread of life with unclean hands. And the oftener  
he

<sup>a</sup> Luke v. 5. <sup>b</sup> Chap. iii. 10.



he celebrates this holy mystery, the more will his Love for Jesus Christ, whose love and death he commemorates, be increased.

In visiting sick and dying persons, he will be put in mind of his own mortality; and in endeavouring to fit them for the account they are to give of their lives, he will of necessity be put in mind of a much greater he himself must soon give of his own.

When he reproves, exhorts, admonishes others, he can hardly do it without being put in mind of the words of the Apostle: "Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?"

If he is diligent in prayer, which he has promised faithfully to be, God will certainly enlighten his mind with saving truths and graces. And an earnest desire to save souls will cause him to be beloved of God, and honoured by men,—assisted by the Holy Spirit, and rendered able to give an account with joy, and see the fruit of his labours.

In short; the faithful discharge of these duties will secure our peace, and our hope in God, and make our account less dreadful.

Let us now consider the duties which God requires of Christians for this care he hath shewn to appoint his own Ministers "to watch for their souls, as they that must give an account." Hear what our Lord Christ himself saith to his Ministers: "Whosoever shall not hear your words, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for that people." And for Christians' better encouragement, he assures them, that he who receives his Ministers receiveth him himself, and God that sent him.

In them, therefore, God is *received, heard, or despised*.—Their authority, while they govern themselves by his word, is the authority of God. "He therefore that despiseth," (they are St. Paul's words,) "despiseth not man, but God." And therefore the same Apostle directeth Christians to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake.

And then for their right to an honourable maintenance, St. Paul assures all Christians, that the Lord himself ordained, "That they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." And, therefore, when we tell people of the great sin of defrauding the Ministers of God, and of denying the rights which the laws of God and man have appointed them, we are doing our duty as faithfully, as when we set before them the sin of *stealing, of adultery, or of any other*

<sup>c</sup> Rom. ii. 21. <sup>a</sup> Matth. x. <sup>e</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 8.

breach of the commands of God, which will be followed with a curse in this life, and, if not repented of, with damnation hereafter.

I shall detain you no longer, than while I conclude this discourse with these following observations:—

In the first place, you will observe how necessary it was, that the church of God should appoint certain times, which should be solemnly observed by all Christians, for begging of God to send faithful Pastors to serve in the sacred Ministry,—such as may, both by their life and doctrine, set forth the glory of God, and set forward the salvation of men. And every man would do well, before he reproaches any Clergyman for his conduct, to ask himself this question,—Have I myself done my duty, and joined with the church of God to pray for all such as are called to the Ministry, that they may live worthy of their vocation?

In the next place, we must beg all that hear us to consider, That the contempt of God's Ministers will end in the contempt of God himself, of his word, his worship, and of every thing that belongs to him.

In short; Christians' respect for their Pastors, and the Ministers of God, ought to be very great, as they expect God's blessing;—but then the Ministers of God out to make it their great endeavour to deserve this respect, by a *sober, prudent, serious, godly, and pious* life and conversation; ever remembering, that by a *mean, light, and foolish* conduct, unbecoming the dignity of one who calls himself, and ought to be, God's Ambassador to men, he will render the Ministry contemptible, and cause men to be guilty of that disrespect and sin which he complains of.

*Lastly*; We should all consider, that a man may have a lawful call to the Ministry, and as such, ought to be obeyed in things pertaining to God; and yet, for want of answering the ends of his calling, he may oppose the great and gracious design of God, who would have all men to be saved.

May God of his great mercy preserve this church from such Pastors,—and give all those, who have been, or are to be, ordained to his immediate service, grace, that in the exercise of their Ministry they may depend upon God, ever pray for his guidance and blessing, and be instruments of bringing glory to God, and many souls to salvation, through Jesus Christ.

To whom, &c.

SERMON



## S E R M O N XC.

PREACHED AT AN ORDINATION.

## THE DUTIES OF MINISTERS AND PEOPLE.

I COR. IV. 1.

*Let a man so account of us as of the Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the Mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required in Stewards that a man be found faithful.*

THE duties which belong to us as *Ministers of Christ, and Stewards of the Mysteries of God*,—and to you, as you are the flock committed to our charge, and as we are *over you in the Lord*;—these duties are so great, and so necessary to be known and remembered, that one cannot well omit such an occasion as *this*, of repeating, and recommending them to *your* serious consideration, as well as to *our own*.

“Let a man,” saith the Apostle, that is, let every Christian, “account of us as the *Ministers of Christ*.” *Account of us*; that is, esteem and treat us, not as *their* Ministers or servants, but as *the Ministers of Christ*. *Account of Us*, not only of St. Paul, but of all *the Ministers of Christ*, to whom he has promised his Spirit unto the end of the world; for we are *Stewards of the mysteries of God*; and, if we are *God’s Stewards*, you know what follows,—our Lord himself will tell you: “He that despiseth you, despiseth me, and God that sent me.”

But then we are not to think, that because we are the *Ministers of Christ, and God’s Stewards*, that therefore we may do what we please. No:—for *it is required in servants and stewards that a man be found faithful*;—*faithful* to his character,—*faithful* to the vows he takes upon him when he enters into his Lord’s service;—*faithful*, with regard to the *mysteries* with which he is intrusted, to the *Lord* whose servant he is, and to the *people of the Lord* committed to his care. These are things, Christians, worthy of our most serious consideration.

For if either *we*, or *you*, are wanting to our duty in this respect, the consequence will be sad and dreadful. If *we*, as Christ’s Ministers, are not *faithful* to our trust,—and if *you*, as our charge, are not careful to hear and obey us, for our Master’s sake,—we must *both* of us expect the wrath of God at the great day of recompence.

I. You shall therefore *first* hear what it is to be a *faithful Steward of the mysteries of*

*God*; and then you will see whether as such we ought to be accounted of; that is, thought worthy of esteem.

Now our *first business*, as Ministers of Christ, is, to endeavour “to turn men from “darkness to light, and from the power of “Satan unto God;” that is, to convince all such as are disposed to hear the truth, that *by nature* they are the children of wrath, enemies to God and goodness; that they bring into the world with them *the seeds of all manner of sin and wickedness*, which, if not restrained by the grace of God, will fill them full of all iniquity, and bring them to destruction both of soul and body.

They are further to be convinced, that “except a man be born of water, and the “Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom “of Heaven.” That this is what Jesus Christ himself has declared, to the end that men, being awakened into a sense of the danger they are in while they are *unconverted*, may strive to “recover themselves “out of the snare of the devil, who are “taken captive by him at his will.”

Now; the ordinary means which God makes use of to convert sinners is, *by the Ministry of the Word* preached and applied to the consciences of men. “How shall “they hear,” saith St. Paul, “without a “Preacher?” And who they are that are commissioned to preach the word, you will hear from our Lord himself: “Go ye,” saith he, “and teach all nations; and lo! I “am with you always, even unto the end “of the world.” *I am with you*, that is, Jesus Christ is with us, by his Spirit, and by his blessing: With whom? Why; with his Apostles, and their lawful successors, as long as the world shall last.

This is the first part of our commission as Ministers of Christ.

II. The next is, *to baptize your children*; that is, to admit them into the covenant of grace, into the church of Christ, which is

† 2 Tim. ii. 26. \* Rom. x. 14. \* Matth. xxviii. 19.



his house and family, by which they are made *members of Christ, children of God, and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven*; that is, they have hereby a right to call God their Father;—they have a right to the forgiveness of their sins upon their true repentance;—they have a right to the assistance of God's Holy Spirit,—to the Ministry and charge of his Holy Angels,—and to the joys of Paradise when they die.

They have, I say, a *right* to all these blessings, by being *baptized* by the lawful Stewards of the mysteries of God;—for this is one of the mysteries committed by Christ to his Ministers, and to *them* only. And a *mystery* indeed it is, that so many blessings should be the effects of so ordinary a ceremony, performed by a mortal man like ourselves. But so God has appointed; and we have great reason to be thankful, that our gracious God has given us a right to eternal happiness upon such easy terms. I say a *right*; for we *may* forfeit our title to Heaven, if we are not careful to live as becomes the children of God.

III. And this brings us to another duty, and burthen upon a Minister of Christ; and that is, *to fit your children for Confirmation*. For indeed parents, too many of them, are so little concerned for their children's eternal welfare, that the greater part, *even of Christians*, would not know why they came into the world, if the Ministers of Christ were not obliged, before they bring persons to be *confirmed*, to take care they be instructed in the necessary knowledge and duties of Christianity;—to convince them of the advantage of beginning betimes to be serious, before sin and hell get the dominion over them;—to instruct them in the *duties* belonging to them as Christians in every state of life unto which it shall please God to call them;—to shew them the *dangers* they are like to meet with, and how to escape them; the *enemies* they have to strive with, and how to overcome them.

Whoever is not instructed in these things does not know what it is to be a Christian;—what his duty is in *this* world, nor what will become of him when he dies. And those parents have a sad account to make, who do not even compel their children to come to be instructed, that being convinced of the necessity either of leading an holy life, or of being for ever undone, they may dedicate themselves to God betimes, that, being under the guidance and protection of his Holy Spirit, they may be secure from fear of evil, while they continue to make use of the means of grace which God has ordained.

IV. For our merciful Lord, knowing the weakness of our nature, has appointed cer-

tain *outward ordinances*, which if we observe as he has directed, we may certainly depend upon the pardon of our sins, and greater degrees of light to know our duty, and of grace and strength to perform it.

The chief of these ordinances is that of THE LORD'S SUPPER, appointed to keep up the remembrance of Christ's death, by which alone we obtain the forgiveness of our sins.

And this is *another of the mysteries* which Christ has committed to his Ministers, to be communicated to all the orderly members of his family. And a very *great charge*, God knows, they have upon them, with regard to *this Mystery*, lest, for want of care to instruct the *ignorant*,—for want of concern to admonish the *negligent*,—and for want of courage to repel the *profane*,—they suffer any to eat and drink their own damnation, not considering the Lord's body.

V. And this brings us to consider another duty incumbent upon the Ministers of Christ, and that is, *to exercise a Godly Discipline*, without which the Church of Christ, *which ought to be holy and without blemish*, would become the contempt of unbelievers.

Our duty therefore is, *To rebuke* gain-sayers,—to reprove all such as hold the truth in unrighteousness,—to let careless and obstinate sinners know plainly whither their wicked ways will lead them at the last,—and in the mean time, until they shall give tokens of repentance and amendment, to deny them the ordinary means of grace, because they render themselves unworthy of them;—and finally, if they continue impenitent, to turn them out of the church, which is the house of God, that being reduced into the state of *Heathens*, without hope, and without promises, they may be awakened into a sense of the danger they are in, and by a timely repentance, recover themselves out of the snare of the devil.

And this, by the way, is the true end of Excommunication, and Church Discipline, where it is rightly administered. To turn wicked men out of Christ's family, as the prodigal in the Gospel left his father's house, until being forced to feed with swine, and weary of such a life, they may with him remember the blessing of being under the government of a tender father, and with him return with words of sorrow and repentance: "Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son: Make me as one of thy hired servants." And then the Ministers of Christ, with joyful hearts, and with the compassion of a father, are ready to receive them again into God's house-

<sup>1</sup> Luke xv. 19.



hold and family. And they have authority from their great Master so to do. "Whatsoever," saith he, "ye shall bind on earth, shall be bound in Heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth, shall be loosed in Heaven."<sup>\*</sup> A power very great indeed; but not too great for God to give, or mortal men, having authority from God, to execute.

And happy it is for sinners, that there is room left for a return (with the prodigal) to their father's house;—that there are persons appointed to receive them, and to restore them to the favour of God, which they had forfeited by their disobedience to his laws.

And let men account this a mercy or not, and of the Ministers of Christ, (who are intrusted with his power) whether they esteem them or no, this will one day be found true, —That such as are, by the just sentence of the Ministers of Christ, shut out of his church, will be shut out of Heaven; and such as upon their true repentance are received into the church, will be received into God's favour. "God," saith St. Paul,<sup>1</sup> "God hath given to us this ministry of reconciliation."

VI. Pursuant to which, there is *another duty and power* belonging to the Ministers of Christ; and this is, *a power of absolving penitent sinners.*

All men being subject to *sin*; and to sin unpardoned, an awakened conscience being an insupportable burthen and torment, our merciful Lord "has given power and commandment to his Ministers, to declare and pronounce to his people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins;" that is, They are in the first place to convince men of the nature and danger of sin; and that it can never be forgiven but by a true repentance;—then they are to shew them in what true repentance consists; namely, in forsaking of sin, in turning to God, and in bringing forth fruits answerable to amendment of life.

It is then the duty of the Minister of Christ to examine whether there appear such marks of a true repentance, and if there do, to absolve him in the name, and by the authority, of Jesus Christ.

It was just thus under the Law, with respect to *Leprosy*. None could cure that sort inflicted by the hand of God for some great sin, but *God only*. And his priests alone were the judges thereof; that is, when a person was healed, and fit to be received into the congregation of Israel, which was a type or figure of Heaven,—as you will find set

down at large in the thirteenth chapter of Leviticus.

VII. *Lastly*; the Ministers of Christ have another duty incumbent upon them, and that is, to *visit their flocks in the times of sickness and affliction*,—to instruct them how to receive the chastening of the Lord to their present and eternal advantage;—to exhort them to do justice to all men before it be too late; to be charitable both in giving and forgiving; to have a steadfast faith and hope in the promises of the Gospel; and, if their lives have been unblameable, or if by a timely repentance they have forsaken their evil ways, to give them comfortable hopes of salvation;—to pray for them, and, if their consciences are burthened, to take their confession, and, upon examining the truth of their repentance, to give them absolution.

These are some of the duties which a Minister of Christ is obliged to perform towards his flock, besides the constant duties of *preaching* and offering up daily *prayers* for a blessing upon your *persons*, upon your *labours*, and upon your *children*,—for the *pardon* of your sins,—for the *graces* you stand in need of,—and for your *everlasting happiness*.

VIII. And now let us look back to the text, and to the Apostle's advice: "Let a man so account of us, as of the Ministers of Christ;" that is, let all Christians, that have the blessing of a standing ministry, learn to put a just value upon so great a privilege;—let them so *account*, that is, esteem of and treat us, "as the Ministers of Christ, and as Stewards of the mysteries of God." What *your* duty is towards them that are over you in the Lord, I will shew you in a very few words.

And in the first place take notice, that they are *Christ's Ministers*,—they are *God's Stewards*:—As *such*, therefore, they are to be treated;—their *advice*, in things relating to their duty, hearkened to;—their reproofs taken in good part;—their *callings* honoured, and their *persons* respected;—ever remembering what St. Paul saith on this occasion:<sup>m</sup> "He that despiseth (the Ministers of Christ) despiseth not man, but God." "I beseech you," saith he, in another place,<sup>n</sup> "to know them that are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake."

But then, secondly, it is your duty, not only to *esteem*, but to *obey* them, in things pertaining to their duty. "If any man," saith our Lord, "neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an Heathen,"<sup>o</sup> or as one that believes not in God. And again; "Whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear

<sup>\*</sup> Matth. xviii. 18. <sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. v. 18.

<sup>m</sup> 1 Thess. iv. 8. <sup>n</sup> 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. <sup>o</sup> Matth. xviii. 17.



“your words, verily, I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah, in the day of judgment, than for that city.” You may judge by the severity of the punishment, what an obligation lies upon all to hear those whom Jesus Christ sends to instruct them.

Your next duty is, to give them (with a chearful heart) what their great Master has appointed them; “for so” (saith St. Paul) “has the Lord” (that is, the Lord Jesus) “ordained, that they which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel.”

And if the law of all Christian nations, pursuant to this ordinance of our Lord, has appointed what proportion every Christian shall contribute towards the maintenance of God’s Ministers, he will be no gainer at the last, who goes about to defraud them of their dues. It is against *reason* and *justice* to defraud men of that which the law has appointed.

Observation and experience might teach you, how well such dealings have prospered with such as have been making experiments. And the Scripture is plain:—“It is a snare,” saith the Wise Man,<sup>1</sup> “to devour that which is holy,” or dedicated to God, as all your tythes were before you were born; and God himself calls it *robbery*, to withhold the tythes.

It is not for our own sakes that I have put you in mind of these things; for, as St. Paul saith, a dispensation is committed to us, and we must preach the Gospel, whether we live by it or not. But it is for your sakes we tell you these things, that God may bless your labours, as he has promised to do; and that you may not bring a moth and a canker-worm into your barns, which shall secretly devour your increase. “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump;” a little ill-gotten goods will carry away a greater substance; and “a fire not blown shall consume them;” that is, they shall be consumed, and nobody shall know how.

In short, my brethren, the world is bad enough as it is, but it would be soon much worse, if the good providence of God had not appointed an order of men, and made it their indispensable duty, To preach the Gospel,—to offer up the prayers and oblations of the faithful,—to praise God for his mercies, and to intercede with him when he is angry,—to warn the unruly,—to comfort the feeble-minded,—to support the weak,—and to be examples to their whole flock.

And because no man on earth is sufficient for these things without the assistance of the Holy Ghost, therefore are they set apart

(after the example of the Apostles, and according to the order of the Holy Spirit) by solemn prayer, and by laying on of hands, that a greater grace may accompany them in the discharge of the several parts of their duty.

In one word:—God hath appointed his own Ministers, by whom he will give mankind those blessings which are necessary to fit them for Heaven and Happiness. And though of ourselves we are nothing, yet by the grace of God, who sends us, we may be instruments of great good to men.

To sum up what has been said in a few words, that you may remember the better:—If we are Christ’s Ministers, then we are accountable to *him*, and to him only, in things pertaining to God. He, and he only, can appoint his own Ministers. If we are God’s Ministers, it behoves us, above all men, to do nothing unworthy the holiness of our characters, that the Ministry be not blamed. If we are the more immediate servants of God, then ought we not to seek to please men, nor to confer with flesh and blood, when our Master’s service calls for us.

You have seen, Christians, what we bind ourselves to, when we become the Ministers of Christ, “to watch for your souls as they that must give an account;”—a consideration so dreadful, that it often makes our hearts to ache with fear and sorrow, when you least think of it.

Do not ye therefore add to our burthen, (which is great enough, God knows, already) do not add to our trouble, by despising our authority, which we have from Jesus Christ; for in doing so, you will despise Jesus Christ, and God that sent him. Do not slight our *Ministry*, by which, if ever you are, you must be reconciled to God. Do not despise our *Persons*, because we are weak men like yourselves, but remember the Lord’s word to St. Paul: “My strength is made perfect in weakness.”

*Lastly*; Do not defraud us of what God has assigned us, lest yourselves be the greatest losers; but rather let both you and we strive in our several places to glorify God.

We, by always remembering the vows that are upon us, using the power which God hath given us for your edification, and not for your destruction; and you readily obeying our godly admonitions;—that both we and you may at last attain the end of our faith and labours, even the salvation of our souls. Which God grant, for Jesus Christ’s sake.

To whom, &c.

<sup>1</sup> Matth. x. 14, 15. <sup>2</sup> Prov. xx. 25. <sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. v. 6. <sup>4</sup> Job xx. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Acts xiii.



## S E R M O N XCI.

AT THE DEDICATION OF THE NEW CHURCH IN KIRK LONAN.

MARCH 25, 1735.

2 CHRON. vi. 40.

We have in the prayer of KING SOLOMON, at the DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE, these words:—*My God! I beseech Thee, let thine eyes be open, and let thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.*

2 CHRON. vii. 15. We have the gracious answer and promise of God to this petition, in these words: *Mine eyes shall be open, and mine ears attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.\**

**W**E all know, that God is every where present to hear the prayers of such as call upon him in sincerity; but then the Holy Scriptures teaches us, that he is, in an especial manner, present in the assemblies of the faithful.

“The Lord give thee blessing out of Sion,” saith the Psalmist. Why out of Sion? Why; because *there* was the temple, the house of God, where his Holy Angels attended, ascending from thence to carry the prayers of the devout worshippers to the Throne of God, and descending to bring down blessings from God,—as they are represented in a vision to Jacob at Bethel.

Now, what the Temple of Jerusalem was to that nation, the same is every parish church to us Christians, and it has a right to all the same gracious promises which God did make to the Temple of Solomon.

Taking this for granted; we will proceed to consider some truths, which have relation to this subject, and which are not so well understood as they should be; such are these following:—

*First*; The great blessing of having convenient places for the publick worship of God.

*Secondly*; The great sin of neglecting the publick worship; as also the evils and judgments which generally follow such neglect.

*Thirdly*; The great regard and reverence which Christians ought to have for places dedicated to the honour and service of God.

*Fourthly*; What their behaviour should be in such holy places.

*Fifthly*; The great blessing of a regular, settled Ministry.

*Sixthly*; The command of God, that his Ministers shall have all just encouragement to discharge their duty chearfully and faithfully.

And *lastly*; The sin and punishment of those who go about to make void this gracious design of God, for the good of his people, as well as for the support of his own Ministers.

I. We will first consider, what a *very great blessing it is to have convenient places for the publick worship of God.*

When God would shew his love and concern for his own people, he lets them know, *that he will set his Tabernacle amongst them*; intimating, that he will always be near them, to hear their prayers, and to help them.

And when that people fell into sin, and into idolatry, to shew his great displeasure against them, he suffered his temple to be destroyed by heathens, as one of the greatest punishments which could be laid upon them. And so they found it and esteemed it, when once they came to feel the want of it.

Be assured of it, Christians, the publick worship of God is an indispensable duty, both with respect to *God's honour*, and *our own greatest interest*.

With respect to the honour of God, it is by this duty that we profess, to all the world, that we are the servants of God;—that, therefore, we profess ourselves bound to adore, to honour, and obey him, after the best and most public manner we are able.

With respect to *ourselves*; as we live and depend upon God's blessing, for our life and health, and for all the good things that

\* See Heb. x. 25.



we have or hope for in this world, or in the world to come, he expects that we should beg these blessings in the places dedicated to his honour, as appears plainly from the several promises he has made to Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple.

And our Saviour on his part hath promised, That where two or three are gathered together in his name, he will grant their requests,—much more will he answer the prayers which are made *in the great congregation*, (as the Psalmist speaks.)

They, therefore, who imagine and say, that they can serve God as well at home as at church, have not considered what we mean by the *publick worship*;—That it is an open and publick acknowledgement of God's glorious perfections, and of our dependance upon him,—of his *power* to help us,—of his *justice* to punish us when we do evil,—of his *mercy* and *goodness* to pity us.

It is owing to all the world, that we believe what he has revealed in his Holy Word there read to us;—that we expect to be judged by that Word at the great day;—that therefore we fear God, and consequently we may expect that all men, with whom we have to do, may trust us as men fearing God's judgments if we do wrong.

And in good truth, they that seldom or never attend the publick worship, can give no sure testimony to the world, that they either *believe* a God or *fear* his judgments; nor do they give any proof to men, that they can be honest upon any true principles of reason or religion.

II. But this is not all. *The sin and evil of neglecting the Publick Worship is very great, with respect to ourselves.*

Christians do not consider, how very apt the very best of us are to forget the duty which we owe to God, to our neighbour, and to ourselves; and that the cares of the world will soon blot out all thoughts of duty.

It pleased God, therefore, from the creation, (for he knew what helps man would want to preserve in his mind the remembrance of his Maker) it pleased Him to appoint one day in seven to be kept holy; and the neglect of this, in all probability, was the occasion of that great wickedness which brought on the flood upon the world of the ungodly.

The same law continued after the flood; and yet, by the neglect of it, how many nations *now* are there, who though they sprung from one man, who taught his children the knowledge of the true God, yet have, at this day, no remembrance of the Creator of Heaven and Earth!

The same law, as to the intent of it, is still in force, and the sad effects of neglecting it *are*, and *will always be*, the same. Such as observe it with any degree of seriousness live in the fear of God; while they that despise the *Lord's Day*, and his *Ordinances*, are too plainly under the power and government of Satan, who leads them captive at his will.

And it is very observable, that such as come to untimely ends, if they die in their senses, do generally confess, that the beginning of their ruin was the neglect of the publick worship, and profaning the Lord's day.

And indeed it cannot well be otherways, if people will not come to church to be re-proved, awakened, and made sensible of what must come hereafter, if they continue to live in sin.

How harsh would it sound to hear a man say,—I have nothing to *ask* of God,—I have nothing to *thank* him for,—I do not owe him any service,—I can live without his blessing,—I desire not the knowledge of his ways.—The most careless sinner would tremble to repeat these words; and yet this, in effect, is the language of those that wilfully neglect and despise the publick worship of God;—this is the language of their actions, though not of their tongue.

Remember, good Christians, that, as such, you all pretend to be *of the Household of Faith*. Now, can any of you, with any pretence, say, that you are of the household of Faith, when you are seldom or never seen at God's house, and with his family?

Think seriously of this, and you will esteem it the greatest blessing to have churches to go to, and you will close with every opportunity of going to your Father's house, lest you lose the inheritance of his obedient and dutiful children.

We must not, indeed, charge all people with this sin. A great *unhappy distance from the Church*,—*bad weather*,—*short days*,—*old age*,—*long and difficult ways*,—*ill health*,—and the like,—very often have hindered even some well-disposed people from going to church as often as they could wish.

[Several of these hindrances, God be praised for it, are now removed, by this house which we have now dedicated to his service. For it pleased God to put it into the hearts of several well-disposed people, whose zeal ought not to be forgotten, and whose names shall be recorded to posterity,—to begin and carry on this good work,—obliging themselves, through God's help, to finish it.

May



May our gracious God remember them all for good;—bless their persons, their labours, and their families,—and all those who have any way contributed to this good work, and to the glory of God, in building an house to the honour of his Majesty! And may this laudable and uncommon zeal provoke many others to follow their example, where the houses of God are falling into decay, or are too small for their congregation to worship God with decency and devotion.]

II. The next thing we come to consider is, THE GREAT BLESSING OF A REGULAR, SETTLED MINISTRY.

Now; that you may know how to value so great a blessing, and that you may not be tempted by Satan and his agents to despise their persons and their ministry; pray take notice of these following truths of the Scripture of God:—That God has expressly promised to bless those whom his Ministers shall bless in his name. “I will bless them, (saith our God) “according to the blessing “pronounced over them.

And that you may not imagine, that this promise belonged to the people of Israel only; I must put you in mind of the words of Jesus Christ our Saviour, when he sent his Apostles: “If, in any place you go to, “*there be a son of peace,*” that is, any one disposed to receive your doctrine and blessing, “your peace,” the blessing of peace, “shall rest upon him; if not, your blessing “of peace shall return to you again.” Which plainly shews that there is something more than an empty ceremony in the blessing of Christ’s Ministers.

But that which will most effectually convince all that are disposed to be convinced, of the great Blessing of a Regular Ministry, will be, to set before you in one short view the work of a Minister of Christ. You will then see how much they contribute to your salvation.

St. Paul declares expressly,\* “That God “is in Christ reconciling the world unto “himself; and that he has committed this “Word of Reconciliation unto his Ministers.”

Let us see in what their ministry consists. And first; as stewards over the house of God, (for so they are called in the Word of God) their duty as such is, to receive into his household and family all who are desirous and capable of being members thereof,—and this they do by the Sacrament of Baptism; which is a blessing that few people, of sense and piety, are willing to be deprived of, for themselves or their children.

\* Numb. vi. 27. \* 2 Cor. v. 19.

In the next place, the work of the Ministry consists in *preaching the Gospel*; that is, in convincing men, that they are sinners,—that they stand in need of God’s mercy, and of a Redeemer,—for that God will call all men to an account, and will judge them according as their works and lives agree with the Gospel, or are contrary to it.

In order to this, they are to exhort Christians to mind their duty, (which they are but too apt to forget) and to rebuke and to reprove them when they see them careless of their souls;—to set before them the terrors of the world to come, on one hand;—and, on the other, to set before them the mercies of God, whenever they are truly afflicted with the burthen of their sins.—Who does not see the great blessing of such a ministration?

But this is not all:—Christians are apt to fall into sin after baptism. What must they do to be restored to the favour of God again? Why; Jesus Christ has ordained another Sacrament, and has appointed his Ministers the dispensers thereof; namely, a Sacrament of Reconciliation, for all such as with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto God.—What a mighty blessing is this for repenting sinners!

Besides this; the Ministers of Christ have a daily charge upon them. They stand obliged (as the Priests under the Law) to offer unto God the concerns and prayers of their several flocks;—to confess their own sins and the sins of their people;—to give God thanks for the mercies he bestows upon them;—and to beg God’s protection and blessing upon their persons and their labours.—Who does not think this a very great blessing indeed?

In one word; these are *they*, by whose ministry you are made Christians;—to whom the care of your souls is committed. These are they (as the Apostle saith) who watch for your souls, as they that must give an account. They are the stewards or dispensers of the mysteries of God to his elect;—by whom he instructs them in the truth, —feeds them with the bread of life,—comforts afflicted souls,—absolves the penitent,—arms them against the fear of death, and fits them for a blessed eternity.

It is certain, these blessings would be more visible, if every Minister of Christ would do what he promises at his ordination;—and woe be to them that do not endeavour to do so!

If they would not take upon them to convert others till they themselves were converted;—if they would undertake the Holy Calling out of a true love of God, and for



for the souls of men;—if their sermons were plain and practical, with an eye to the understanding and capacities of those that are to hear them;—if they would always read the Service, and administer the Sacraments, with great seriousness, *doing holy things after an holy manner*;—and take care *that the Ministry be not blamed*, through any liberties they take:—This would convince the world effectually of the great blessing of a standing ministry.

I shall conclude this head with the prophetic declaration and curse of such as despised the Priesthood under the Law of Moses:—And sure the Ministers of Jesus Christ are not less the care of God.

In the xxxiiiid chapter of Deuteronomy, Moses, prophesying of Levi, and the Priesthood, hath these remarkable words: “They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: They shall put incense before thee, and burnt-sacrifice upon thine altar. Smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again;” that is, as one may suppose, that they leave no posterity behind them, as *Korah, Dathan, and Abiram*, did not leave any to survive them.

Do not imagine, Christians, that it is for our own sakes, but for your’s, that we magnify our office, as the Apostle speaks: It is, that you may be sensible of the blessing you enjoy, and of the danger of despising the means of salvation.

IV. We come now to consider, *the express Command of God, that His Ministers should have all just encouragement to discharge their duty with fidelity and cheerfulness.*

An *House of God* supposes, that He has a *Family*;—that he has servants and ministers peculiarly belonging to his household, which is his church.

He took especial care for the support of these under the Law; not leaving it to the fickle humours of those for whose benefit they were appointed His Ministers.

St. Paul assures us, that Christ has done the same under the Gospel:—“So hath the Lord ordained, that they which preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel.”—So; that is, (as is plain from what went before) as the Priests under the Law had a fixed maintenance appointed by God, so Christ has ordained, that his Ministers shall have a settled maintenance for preaching the Gospel.

Now, this was a *Tenth* before the Law, a *Tenth* under the Law; and a *Tenth* has been continued under the Gospel, and has

been the least that any Christian Lawgiver ever made God’s part. And this proportion is unchangeable, if either the Laws of God or man can make a thing unchangeable. And if Christ’s Ministers (as it often happens) are forced to take less than God’s portion, rather than be continually striving with the people of their flock, woe be to them which take the advantage of such lenity!

God has most solemnly promised his blessing upon the payment of what he has appointed. The words are, as it were, a challenge to men: “Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, and prove me here-with, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of Heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

And take notice, it is upon this very account, that the Apostle saith, “God is not mocked;” that is, he will not suffer himself to be mocked; “for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap.”

That God gives, and withholds his blessings, as men and nations deserve, is a truth not to be questioned by those that either read his Word, or observe his providence.

V. We now come, in the last place, to consider, *the great regard and reverence which Christians ought to have for places dedicated to the honour and service of God.*

And first, if you remember that this is the house of God, you will be careful and zealous to keep it in good and decent repair, as ever you expect the favour and blessing of God.

Hear what God himself declared by his Prophet Haggai, [ch. i.] when they neglected to repair his Temple: “Ye have sown much and bring in little, and when ye brought it home I did blow upon it;—Why? saith the Lord of hosts.—Why, because of my house which lieth waste, and ye run every one to his own house.”

This is very proper to be considered by those who grudge every penny they pay towards the decent repairs of the Church, and very often must be compelled by law even to be kind to themselves.

Our next indispensable duty is, *to go to Church on all such days as are set apart for the publick worship of God.* And this every Christian will chuse to do, who has any regard either for the honour of God, or for his own salvation.

As to the Honour of God, they know little of the nature of true religion, who do not know, that publick worship is an homage and duty which all people owe to the



Creator of Heaven and Earth. And it is a shrewd sign of Atheism for any man not to give this publick testimony of his faith and fear of God. And we may, without breach of charity, conclude, that such people have no concern at all for their salvation.

What a murmuring such people would make, if a sentence of excommunication were denounced against them, though no temporal evils were to follow. And yet, by absenting from Church, they, in effect, lay themselves under that dreadful sentence, and put themselves under the power of Satan.

VI. We are next to consider, *What we go to Church for.* Why; even to beg God's pardon for those sins, which, if not forgiven, will most certainly be our everlasting ruin;—to beg those graces and helps, without which we can never please God, never go to Heaven;—and to give God thanks for those mercies, which we have no reason to expect will be continued, when we are so ungrateful as not to acknowledge them.

We are also to hear God's Holy Will and Word read and preached, which is one of the great means of grace and salvation. And we are, by a publick appearance at God's House, to testify our dependance upon God for life, and breath, and all things; and to profess openly, that we are members of his household and family.

But remember, I beseech you, once for all, *that it is no honour done to God, to be acknowledged, adored, and worshipped in the Church, by one who dishonours him out of it.*

We are now come into the House of God. Pray take notice, that, in the language of the Scripture, we are said to be BEFORE God, when we are in his house. This will oblige us to take especial care of our behaviour, during our stay in his house.

We shall, in the most devout and humble manner and posture, beseech him to pardon

what is past, and to amend what is amiss in us for the time to come. We shall adore the mercy of God, who spares us when we deserve punishment; and in all the duties we perform, we shall shew, by our outward devout behaviour, that our hearts do really go along with our lips, in every thing we ask of God, or say of him.

We shall consider God as speaking to us by his Word, and by his Ministers; and we shall attend to what is spoken, and to our duty told us, with humility and patience.

And lastly; we shall receive the blessing of God pronounced by his own Minister, with the greatest devotion and thankfulness; being assured by God himself, that his blessing shall be upon them that do so: "They shall put my name," saith God, "upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them."

That I may leave a greater impression upon your minds of the value of such a blessing, I will rehearse to you the manner of that people receiving it. You will find it in the fiftieth chapter of Ecclesiasticus, at the 21st verse, in these words: "When they had finished the service, then the Priest went down, and lifted up his hands over the whole congregation, to give the blessing of the Lord with his lips; and they bowed themselves down to worship, that they might receive a blessing from the Most High."

With which blessing I shall conclude this whole discourse:—"The Lord bless you, and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you, and give you peace evermore."

Now, to Him be glory, dominion, and power, for ever and ever. Amen.

\* Num. vi.



# S E R M O N    X C I I .

## AT THE CONSECRATION OF DOUGLASS CHAPEL.

E X O D.   XX.   24.

*In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.*

**W**HETHER we consider the honour we do to God in *dedicating a place to his name*, or the benefit we propose to ourselves, in setting such a decent place apart for God's service, where we hope he will vouchsafe us his more especial presence and blessings;—either of these considerations are sufficient to make us very chearful upon this occasion.

That which I have to say upon this subject shall be very far from lessening your joy; for I shall endeavour to satisfy you in these following particulars:—

*First*; That this antient promise, of God's especial presence in all places where he records his name, belongs to us as well as to the Jews of old; and that God will meet us here and bless us.

*Secondly*; I will endeavour to explain to you what we mean by God's especial presence; when he is said to come unto us to such places as are consecrated to his honour and service.

*Lastly*; I will set before you the blessings we may justly expect, from God's presence in this place, and in all other places dedicated to his name.

I. Now, that *this antient promise belongs to us, as well as to the Jews*, we have the Word of God for it, which will serve instead of a thousand reasons besides.

In Malachi [chap. i. 11.] we have this express prophecy, concerning the Church of God in the days of the Messiah:—"From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same, my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense (that is, holy prayers) shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering."

The meaning of which prophecy is this: The sacrifices and service of the Jews, in whose temple God had recorded his name, became at last unacceptable unto God by reason of their sins, as had been often told them by the Prophets. Notwithstanding this, they depended upon God's favour and

promises made unto their forefathers; they remembered the testimony which God had given to their temple, when it was first dedicated by Solomon; and by what providences he had caused this temple to be again rebuilt, after it had been destroyed for their idolatry; therefore they were confident, that God would not cast off his own people, the children of Abraham. For whom then would he have to serve him?

This gave occasion to this remarkable prophecy in favour of the Gentiles, by which God declares, that the time was coming, when the temple of Jerusalem should not be the only place of solemn worship, but that in all parts of the world men should offer up incense, and a pure offering, and to that end should dedicate places of worship to the name of the true God.

Which prophecy has been in a great measure already fulfilled; since, in most parts of the habitable world, the Gentiles have been converted to Christianity, and have built Churches to the honour and for the service of God.

And as King Solomon, pursuant to the promise made in the text, did build and dedicate the Temple of Jerusalem to the name of God, which work God did most favourably accept of, and it became the only place of worship of the true God for many ages: By virtue of the same promise, *which you see belongs to us*, and in imitation of this Prince's piety in this thing, which was so well approved of God, we are here met together, *to dedicate this House to God*,—depending upon the same gracious promise,—expecting the same favourable acceptance,—and hoping for the same presence and blessing, as long as this house shall continue; at least as long as we shall continue to deserve so great a mercy.

And have we not all the reason imaginable to depend upon this, since God has hitherto blessed this undertaking with a success far beyond our expectations? May Almighty God remember all our benefactors for good, and favourably receive our own oblations!



oblations! May they, and we, and all that have contributed of their substance, or their labours, towards this pious work, be blessed in all their other lawful undertakings! And may the generations to come long enjoy the benefit of our devotions, and this dedication,—the Lord God dwelling amongst them!

“But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold; the Heaven, and the Heaven of Heavens, cannot contain him; how much less the house which we have built?” These are the words of Solomon; and yet he built a Temple for God, and God was pleased to call it *his House*, and to vouchsafe his presence there after an especial manner.

Which brings us to enquire into the meaning of this expression in the text, *I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.*

Nobody questions, but that God is every where present, to hear the prayers of all that call upon him in truth and sincerity; but the Holy Scriptures teach us to believe and say that God may be, after an especial manner, in some one place; as for instance, he is said to have come down from Heaven to see if the wickedness of Sodom was altogether as great as the cry thereof had made it.

In another place, when the children of Israel cried unto God in their affliction, the Lord said unto Moses, “I am come down to deliver them.”

The meaning of such expressions must be *this*: It shall appear that I am among you, by the judgments that I will bring upon the wicked, and by the blessings the righteous shall receive from me. This is what we mean, when we pray that God may be with ourselves or others; that is, that we, or they, may find by experience, that God sees, and hears, and is ready to help us.

Thus Jacob expressed himself,<sup>a</sup> when he had dedicated *a place for the House of God*: “If God will be with me,”—if it shall appear that he is with me;—“by his keeping me in the way that I go; by giving me bread to eat, and raiment to put on; so that I come again to my Father’s house in peace; then shall the Lord be my God; and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God’s House: and of all that thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth unto Thee.”

But this is not all that is meant by God’s presence with any man, or society of men: He is present with them by his holy Angels, to watch over them for good.

Thus Abraham assures his servant,<sup>b</sup> “That God will send his Angel before him, and prosper him in his way.”

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xxviii. 20. <sup>b</sup> Gen. xxiv. 7.

The same promise God makes expressly to the children of Israel: “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared.”

And the Prophet Daniel<sup>d</sup> affirms, that he was delivered from death by an Angel of God; as St. Peter was from prison.—Thus God is present with his servants in all places.

But still he is more especially present in the assemblies of the faithful, in places consecrated to his name. For there his holy Angels keep their *stations*; there they wait the appointed times of devotion, to defend, to assist, and to comfort, the worshippers of God.

Shall we think that the Patriarch Jacob had that vision related in the 28th chapter of Genesis, for his own instruction only? No, certainly; but to inform and assure succeeding ages, that wherever the House of God is, there the Angels of God are ascending and descending, carrying up the prayers of the faithful to Heaven, and bringing down blessings to all such as are worthy to receive them.

Agreeably to this doctrine, Josephus the Jew tells us, that a while before the destruction of Jerusalem, a Light was seen in the Temple, and a Voice heard, saying, *Let us leave this place*,—the Angels of God forsaking their station there, since God had resolved to suffer that house to be destroyed.

All which is confirmed by the Spirit of God, (1 Cor. xi. 10) where it is said, that women, when they come to the assemblies of the Saints, ought, in token of their subjection, to be very decent in their behaviour and apparel, *because of the Angels* that are present in such assemblies.

After this, I need not tell you, that this is the doctrine of all Christians from the times of Jesus Christ to this day:—That the Angels of God are there where the name of God is recorded; that is, in all places dedicated, according to his pleasure, to his service.

And shall we doubt of this, because we do not see those glorious beings with our bodily eyes? This was indeed the case of Elisha’s servant,<sup>e</sup> who was soon convinced of his error; for when he saw the city encompassed about with soldiers, he cries out, “Alas, my Master, what shall we do?” He saw none to help them; and he believed there was none. But God opened his eyes, “and, behold! the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”

<sup>c</sup> Exod. xxiii. 20. <sup>d</sup> Chap. vi. 22. <sup>e</sup> 2 Kings vi. 15.



Upon the whole then, with good authority we may affirm, that at this time, and in this very place, the Angels of God are actually present with us, observing our behaviour, assisting our devotions, rejoicing over every sinner that repenteth, gladly carrying up an account of our piety to the Throne of Grace, and grieving to see any of us careless, and unconcerned, when it is for our life.

II. And now we come to enquire, *Whether all assemblies, where the true God is worshipped, have this privilege of God's especial presence amongst them.*

We can by no means affirm this. The Turks worship the true God after a way of their own invention. The Jews worship the same God we do; and yet, for the present, they are cast off. And even many, that call themselves Christians, assemble to worship the God we adore, who yet have no warrant from the Holy Scriptures to expect the presence and blessing of God in their assemblies. And whether such as separate without cause from the regularly established Church where they live, can depend upon God's presence with them, we must leave it to Him to judge.

But that which more concerns us to know is this: That we may be assured of God's presence and blessing in *our* Churches, and the company and assistances of his holy Angels, if we drive them not away by our indecent behaviour.

We have Priests, and a Ministry, established according to the Word of God and the practice of the Church in all ages of Christianity;—we have a Church and Altar, where the memorial of God's Name and Love are recorded;—we have Sacraments of Christ's appointment, to make, and to keep us members of his body the Church;—we have a reasonable service, and according to God's Word;—and we hold communion with all Christian Churches in the world, which have not forsaken the rule of faith and discipline, *the Holy Scriptures*. And therefore we do with great assurance depend upon God's presence amongst us and in our assemblies; and expect the blessings we pray for.

III. And now we come to consider, *What those blessings are, which we may justly expect from God's presence in our Churches and Chapels dedicated to his Name.*

Here then is the grant which Solomon obtained from God, when he dedicated the Temple of Jerusalem: "If there be dearth in the land, if there be pestilence, blasting, or mildew; if the enemy shall besiege

them; whatsoever fore, whatsoever sickness there be;—then what prayer, or what supplication soever shall be made of any man, or of all the people, when every one shall know his own fore, and his own grief, and shall spread forth his hands in God's house: then will God hear from Heaven his dwelling-place, and forgive, and render unto every man according to his works."

All which blessings Jesus Christ hath obtained for his servants and followers, and they may depend upon them. Therefore, it ought to be looked upon as one of the greatest instances of God's favours to us; that we have places of publick worship, where we may have a correspondence with Him, who alone can hear and answer our petitions and wants.

But then, pray observe, that God doth not promise to hear the prayers of all that appear before him, but of those only *who know their own fore, and their own grief.*

While we think we can help ourselves;—while we are not sensible that we want God's help and blessing;—while we live as if we neither fear God, nor depend upon him;—while we ask his blessings, as if we cared not whether we received them or not;—it is no wonder if God does not regard us.

But if we come to God's House, out of a sense of our dependance upon him for life, and breath, and all things,—out of a sense of our own unworthiness, and inability to help ourselves,—out of a sense of the greatness of our sins, and the danger of not having them pardoned;—if we come in confidence of God's mercy in Jesus Christ to all that call upon God in his name,—resolving to live up to that measure of knowledge and power which God has given us;—then may we be assured, that God will hear us, answer us, and do abundantly more for us than we can ask or think.

Thus you have seen what authority and reason we have for what we are doing, and what cause we have to rejoice in the work we have done. For this is the sum of what I have said:—

In all places where the name of God is recorded, according to his Will and Word, there God will meet his servants and bless them. How will he meet them? Why; he will order his holy Angels to be present at their assemblies,—to assist their devotions,—to observe their behaviour,—to bring up their petitions to the Throne of Grace,—and to carry down the blessings they have rightly prayed for.

Now; it has ever been thought meet, that such places as are designed for this intercourse



tercourse betwixt God and Man should be sanctified by prayer; that is, set apart from common uses. The Temple of Jerusalem was so consecrated; and God approved of the action after a most solemn manner.

After this, God declared, (as you have seen) that in the days of the Messiah, *in all places* (as well as at Jerusalem) *men should offer incense and a pure offering*; and consequently should have places set apart for that service.

When this time came, the Apostles of Jesus Christ, and their successors, observed this method as well as the circumstances of time and place would permit;—they had their *upper rooms*, often mentioned in the New Testament;—they went to pray in such places, *where prayer was wont to be made*;—they forbade all indecent behaviour in such places. And God visited the Christians for their taking the same liberties in his house, that they took in their own.<sup>1</sup>

And people are commanded to come to such places with reverence and decency, *because of the Angels of God*, which are there present.

And lastly; here we are assured God will meet us, and give us the blessings we want and pray for: For we are the offspring of those Gentiles to whom the prophecy belongs.

We have called this place by *his Name*;—we have prayed him to vouchsafe us his presence;—we resolve to offer him no oblation or service, but such as he has commanded.

Why then should we despair of being favourably received? Only let us resolve and live like people who have the Lord for their God;—then will God pour down his blessings upon us, and we shall be safe under his protection here, and hereafter dwell with him for ever.

And now, having endeavoured to make you sensible of the reason and advantage of having a house set apart for the honour and service of God, where we may pay our devotions, and be sure to be heard, if it is not our own faults; it will be proper to consider the duty of people who enjoy such a blessing.

And *first*, it is our duty to possess our hearts with a true value for the benefit of the Divine Presence dwelling among us.

The way to do this is, to consider the condition of our being;—that we are creatures whose dependence is entirely upon God, for life, for health of body, for peace of mind, for comfort in this world, and

happiness in the next. That it is therefore necessary, at all times, to apply to Him for these blessings, and to preserve his friendship by frequenting his house.

It is true, he makes his Sun to shine upon the evil and the good; and we must not judge of our interest in his favour, by those outward dispensations only. And therefore these are not the things that we are to set our hearts upon, and pray for, in the first place.

But that which sure concerns us all to know and consider is this, That we are sinful creatures, and without God's pardon undone for ever;—that we have many and powerful enemies, and without God's succour we are sure to be overcome;—that we are extremely corrupted both in our understandings and affections, and without God's grace, we can neither know, nor perform our duty;—that the happiness of Heaven (which we all hope for) is not to be obtained but in keeping the commandments of God, and in communion with his church.

He that considers these things will value the blessing of having God's House near him, where he can go for pardon when he has offended God;—where he can go for help and grace, which he always stands in need of;—and where he can hold a constant and open communion with the Church of Christ, and by that means can claim a share, and a right, in all the blessings *there* prayed for,—in all the promises of Christ made to his church,—and in all the mercies he vouchsafes her.

From hence you may learn how careful Christians should be *not to be guilty of such crimes as will deprive them of holding communion with the Church of Christ*.

It is not every body that considers it, and yet every body ought to know it, that whoever is for his offences hindered from coming to the Sacrament, is in a state of damnation while he continues so, and does not endeavour by a true, humble, and sincere penance, to obtain absolution.

This is a thing so true, and a matter of so great concern, that St. Paul, in his letter to Timothy,<sup>2</sup> charges him, before God, and our Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect Angels, openly to rebuke such sinners, that others may take warning, and see, and fear, and do no more wickedly.

Do we think that people in those days were not as subject to shame, and to like passions with us? Do not we think that they knew as well as we do, whether church censures might be safely neglected or ex-

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvi. 13.<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xi.<sup>3</sup> Chap. v. 20.



cused by friends or any other way? And yet we find that Christians then, even when there was no law to compel them, submitted to any censure in hopes of being restored to the communion of the Church; which, by the way, was a mighty proof of the truth and power of Christianity.

It had been easy for offenders then to have escaped penance, and to have been revenged, if they had pleased, on those that censured them;—they would have been rewarded for discovering the assemblies and pastors of the faithful; and yet they submitted to those very persons whom they had it in their power to ruin, forced thereto by the power of God, and the terrors of the world to come.

But, God knows, there are more ways of being out of this blessed communion besides by church censures.

If people will neglect the Holy Sacrament, and the assemblies of the faithful; if they will live in secret, but wilful sin, they are out of communion without the censures of the church; and by that means, they are without hopes, without promises, and live without God in the world.

But it is not only our duty, and our interest, to hold communion with the Church of God, by frequenting its assemblies; but it is our duty, in an especial manner, to take care how we behave ourselves there.

If the Angels attend the worshippers of God,—if we believe that they are indeed amongst us,—how very careful should we be to behave ourselves with great decency and devotion, lest they, beholding our indifferency and slothfulness, even when our salvation is at stake, forsake our churches, return to Heaven, and there report, that of a truth, the fear of God is not amongst us.

Rather let us consider, how it is we behave ourselves when any of us are to ask a favour of our betters, That we consider what we are going about,—that we come before, and speak to them with great respect;—that we patiently wait *their* time and pleasure;—that we receive their favours with thankfulness;—that we observe very diligently the commands they give us;—and lastly, that we leave their presence with thankful hearts, and chearful countenances;—and that we do all this naturally, and without needing any body to tell us, that it is fit we should so behave ourselves.

And now, must it not argue great negligence, or a very profane disposition of heart, that when God is present with us, by his holy Angels;—when we are asking his pardon,—praying for his favours,—desiring

that his judgments may not overtake us, which we have justly deserved;—we do all this with as much carelessness and ind devotion, as if we were sure God saw us not, or as if we cared not for it, though he did.

But people that are serious, and well-instructed, will not behave themselves so, when they appear before God.

They will consider what in reason is expected from them;—they will think that it is not without grounds, that almost all nations and religions do shew some reverence when they enter into their temples.

And, above all, they will remember, that God has expressly commanded his worshippers to *reverence his Sanctuary*; to look to their feet, (that is, to approach with reverence his glorious presence) when they go to the house of God.

And when they offer their sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving, they will take care it shall not be the *sacrifice of fools*, who think they have done all that is commanded or expected from them, when they have been at the House of God.

But thoughtful and good people will consider, that they come to church to pray for pardon, having broken the commandments of God, and therefore they ought not to break them as soon as they leave God's House. They consider, that hither they come to pray for grace to enable them to know and to do their duty;—that therefore they are bound to live up to what they know, and are enabled to do. They consider, that when they have been praising God, at his House, it will by no means become them to dishonour him abroad, in their lives and conversations. And these are the people we should imitate.

Thus far I have kept close to my subject: And I hope I do not go from it, when I put you in mind of your duty to those whom God has appointed *His Ministers* in all places where He records his name.

Is it not an unaccountable thing, that people shall pretend to be thankful to God that they are Christians, and yet shall be well pleased to see that Order of Men despised, by whose hands they were received into the Church of Christ?

Rather learn to honour them as they are your betters, not as men, but as Priests of the Most High God.

Attend to what they preach; join with them devoutly when they pray; slight not their reproofs; despise not their absolution and blessing.

Do



Do this for God's sake, and your own, that you may hold communion with Jesus Christ, with the Holy Angels, with the Saints on Earth, and those in Heaven.

But then, if such an Order of Men are necessary to keep up this communion and friendship betwixt God and his worshippers, how worthily should such persons behave themselves in the Church of God? How blameless, how holy, how industrious, should they be, that they may not only stop the mouths of gainsayers, but be living examples of all the virtues they recommend to others!

Thus much I thought fit to say to all Christians in general that are met together upon this occasion.

I have but one word to add to *you*, that are like to receive the greatest benefit by the building and dedicating this goodly structure.

You have built, and it is now consecrated, a convenient and decent place of worship; it will very much increase your guilt, if you neglect to attend the service of God, as often as it is here performed.

If the Angels of God attend here to bring your prayers before God, will any of you be indifferent, whether or no you come hither? Will you dare to spend the Lord's Day, without just cause, at home, when the Angels are here to meet you? Will you let your children be exposed to judgments and dangers, by suffering them to be idle and to play at home, when their Angels (which, our Saviour saith, see the face of God) are in the congregation of the faithful? Will not all those, that are without reason elsewhere, be exposed to the power of the Devil, without a helper?

I beseech you, that this House of God may not be a snare and a cause of increasing your guilt and misery. But that you may attend the service of God hereafter to be

performed in it; and after such a manner as shall evidently shew, you consider where you are, and what you are doing.

I have shewn you very particularly, that all things conspire to make you careful of your thoughts, and words, and actions, whenever hereafter you enter this place.

All things conspire to drive away profaneness and negligence:—

The presence of the Angels of God,—the use and service this house is now set apart for,—the business which brings us hither,—the blessings we may expect to meet with here,—and the danger of departing from God's House with a curse instead of a blessing.

And now, O God, we most humbly beseech Thee, since thy name is recorded in this place, let thine eyes be open, and thine ears attent unto the prayers that shall be made in it.

May the inhabitants of this town never provoke Thee, by any wickedness, to withdraw thy presence from this House, which we have dedicated to thy honour; but may they, in all their necessities, have this place to flee unto, this House of Defence nigh at hand.

May thy Sabbaths be here remembered, and devoutly kept;—may thy Sacraments be here administered and received with great devotion;—may the youth be instructed, the aged put in mind of their duty, and all made living temples of the Holy Ghost! That thou mayest bless us, and that we in return may honour Thee, “For Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive honour, and glory, and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are, and were created.”

“Glory be to God on High, and on earth peace, good-will towards men,” for ever and ever.



## S E R M O N X C I I I .

PREACHED AT A PUBLICK PENANCE.

THE POWER OF GOD'S MINISTERS TO REBUKE SINNERS AND RECEIVE THEM ON REPENTANCE.

J O S H . vii. 19, 20.

*And Joshua said unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me. And Achan answered Joshua, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done.*

THE very text I have chosen, (the occasion of which you may see at your leisure) the *text*, I say, teacheth us after what manner we ought to treat such as have fallen into any grievous sins, in order to bring them to a sense of their error.

*My Son*, saith Joshua, the prince and leader of the people of Israel; *My Son!*—to a man who for his sin had deserved and was immediately put to death.

And shall not we, with the same tenderness, and with greater, if it be possible, receive the confession of one of our fellow-Christians, who professeth, *and we hope sincerely*, to turn from his evil ways?

What passions other people have upon such occasions as these, I cannot tell; but for myself, I profess, so many mortifying and sorrowful thoughts come into my heart at such times as these, that those who undergo the shame of *publick penance* scarce suffer more than I do, who have inflicted it. I consider myself as one, subject to the same *infirmities*, the same *temptations*, and the same *dangers*, with those that have fallen; and that it is owing to the mere mercy of God, and not to my own wisdom, or strength, or holiness, that sin and hell have not got the dominion over me.

Such a sorrowful occasion as this, even forces one to remember, every man his own failings, which have been enough to have provoked God to have given the very best of us up to our own heart's lusts, *but that God is gracious and merciful, long-suffering, forgiving iniquity and transgression.*

Add to this, that as we are Christians, and all of one body, *the Church*; one member cannot suffer, but all the members must suffer with it.

We have a notable instance, in this very chapter, (of which the text is a part) to

what judgments a whole church and people are liable for the transgressions of particular persons, *until the crimes are confessed and punished.*

The children of Israel are beaten by their enemies;—their leader rends his clothes;—the elders of Israel are under great sorrow and confusion, and know not which way to turn themselves for help;—and all this, because of *one* man who had sinned, who had broken the command of God.

It was for this reason, amongst others, that St. Paul<sup>1</sup> so sharply blames the Corinthians, that they had not bewailed the incestuous person, who had not only given scandal to all sober Christians, but would be a curse to them if he was not put away from among them: So that as no man is safe while notorious sins are unpunished, so in truth no good man can be unconcerned when such punishments are inflicted by the governors of the church.

But we, that are God's Ministers, have still greater reason to be very sensibly affected, when we consider, that perhaps it is for some *fault of ours*, some great *neglect of our duty*;—and that it is to reprove *us*, that God has suffered any of our flock to fall into such dangerous and repeated crimes.

All these things laid together, you will all be satisfied, as well as I am, that tears will become the very best of us upon these occasions, and that every one for himself, *as well as for this our brother*, ought with penitent hearts, and humble spirits, to smite our breasts, and say, *God be merciful unto us miserable sinners.*

And oh! that I could so speak upon this *sad occasion*, and you would so seriously attend to what I say, that by the favour of God, we might, for the future, have fewer instances of the wickednesses we are subject

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. v. 2.



to, when God gives any of us up to ourselves, for the hardness of our hearts.

“My Son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and tell me now what thou hast done, hide it not from me.”

From this exhortation we learn, *first*, that when any man has done foolishly, and broken the commands of God, the greatest glory he can give to God, and the only amends he can make, is to confess his fault, not only to God, but (where scandal has been given) unto man also.

“And Achan answered Joshua, and said, “Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done.”

From this humble and ready confession (even where his life was at stake) we may learn, *secondly*, That when a man's conscience is truly awake, and well informed, he will not scruple to confess his fault, and take shame to himself.

And these are the two things that I shall endeavour to convince you of in the discourse I am now going to make to you, which I pray God give his blessing to.

I. And first, I will shew you *how we are said to glorify God in the publick confession of our crimes.*

We all profess to believe that God is Almighty,—that he can do whatever he pleaseth;—which belief ought in all reason to keep us from offending him by breaking his laws; for, “by the fear of the Lord,” (saith the Wise Man) “men depart from evil.” And whom shall we fear, if we fear not him who can destroy both body and soul in hell?

But notwithstanding we all profess to believe the Almighty power of God, there are but too many who live without any fear of God in their hearts.

Now; when a sinner, struck with a sense of his guilt, and the terrors of the world to come, freely professeth that he fears the mighty power of God, and that God can punish him both in this world, and in the next, though he should escape in this;—when this fear forceth him to confess those crimes, which otherwise he would be ashamed and afraid to own;—this is proper to convince all that hear and see him, *that God is indeed great, and greatly to be feared.*

And God is glorified by such a confession, and men are made more careful, and fearful of offending against his Almighty power, while they see the greatest sinners humbling themselves before his Majesty;—professing themselves overcome and conquered, and

their stubborn hearts subdued by the fear of the Lord.

*Secondly*; We give glory to God, by confessing his infinite knowledge, and that nothing is hid from him. When men are about to commit works of darkness, they hope such deeds will never come to light; and yet all the care they can take to conceal their crimes only serves to convince them, (if they have any grace) that there is no place so secret, no contrivance so cunning, no night so dark, no corner so remote, but where the eye of the Lord is present, to bring to light the hidden things of darkness: *And that all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.* When sinners, (I say) after all their pains to conceal their crimes, are forced to own this, others will be apt to glorify God, and to acknowledge, with holy Job, “That his eyes are upon the ways of man, and that he understandeth all his goings.”

*Thirdly*; Sinners glorify God when they confess his justice in bringing upon them that shame, those punishments, those sorrows, which they have justly deserved; so that as men shall have reason to say, *Verily, there is a reward for the righteous*; so shall they be forced to own, *Verily, there is a God that judgeth the world.*

*Fourthly*; They that confess their faults, and turn from their evil ways, do glorify God, in acknowledging the wisdom of God, and the goodness of his laws. They have found by sad experience, and they freely confess it, that there is no solid happiness to be found in the ways of impiety; and that when men forsake the ways of God, they forsake their own happiness. And when we own this to the world, others will conclude, that however bewitching some sins may be, yet they are to be abhorred, forasmuch as bitterness will be the end of them, and sorrow, at the best, their reward.

*Lastly*; We give glory to God in confessing and forsaking our sins, inasmuch as we shew the power of faith in his promises. For who could leave the pleasures of sin, though they are but for a season? Who could prevail with himself to despise the present temptations of a naughty world, to which he has been long accustomed, but by the power of Faith; by which he sees, and is persuaded, that the blessedness of the world to come is not to be forfeited for some short and foolish pleasure he may meet with in this life; and by which faith he is verily persuaded, that God will forgive, and receive, and bless with eternal happiness, all such as with hearty repentance turn unto him, through faith in Jesus Christ.

<sup>m</sup> Chap. xxxiv. 21.

Thus



Thus you see, that every one that repenteth, and confesseth his faults, by doing so, *giveth glory to God*: And this is the best amends that a sinner can make; and this too is matter of the greatest comfort to sinners, who would otherwise despair of mercy, but that it is for the glory of God that they repent and turn from their evil ways.

But, after all, *the greatest glory we can give to God* is, to live in obedience to his laws, to avoid all scandalous sins, and the temptations that lead to them.

And here let me, for God's sake, prevail with all that now hear me, to take up serious resolutions of living more soberly and circumspectly for the time to come. Will people never take warning, by the misfortunes of others, to prevent their own?

How many good estates have been squandered and come to nothing, by the idleness and intemperance of their owners! How many hopeful people have been corrupted by keeping base and unworthy company! How many base blots have been brought into worthy families, by persons indulging themselves, in drunkenness first, and then in whoredom!

But it were well if this were all: For how many souls have not we reason to fear have been lost, by people's giving themselves up to voluptuousness; who, because God has given them estates, think they have a right to do with them what they please, though to the dishonour of God their benefactor!

I do the more earnestly press this upon you, because I am persuaded, that company-keeping, and tippling, is the very beginning of most men's misfortunes;—it is this which makes men very often to prefer an ale-house to the House of God;—it is this which provokes God to leave men very often to themselves, and their own heart's lusts;—it is this which insensibly sinks the best estates, and crumbles them into pieces;—lastly, it is this vice which is generally the occasion of, and is for the most part offered as an excuse for, the most scandalous crimes.

Good God! what a pass is religion come to, when those very sins, which the Word of God declares will shut men for ever out of Heaven, are looked upon as no crimes!

I will not reckon up some other vile things which this sin has led others into, because I would hope that seasonable reproof will not always be lost upon men who are otherwise of good understanding:—But this I must add, that we are all by nature so subject to temptations, to sin, and to misfortunes, that a man had need to have his

reason and his senses always about him, to prevent his misery and shame in this world, and, in the world to come, eternal damnation; especially when we consider, that the good Spirit of God, and his Holy Angels, can never delight to attend, and to protect, such as are given to this vice: They are not fit company for good men, much less for good Angels.

I dare appeal to all that hear me, let them but call themselves to an account, and they will find, that drinking and intemperance have led them into the greatest crimes they have fallen into. And, indeed, when a man is in drink, no one can answer for him what he will attempt before he returns to his reason and right mind.

But though he should recover his senses without hurting his neighbour, without prejudicing his estate, and it may be his health too, yet he has one sin more to answer for;—and every Christian man ought to know that his soul, which lies at stake, is of more concern to him than all other considerations.

I will add no more now upon this head, because I would hope that people of thought and modesty will lay it to heart; and my design is not so much to upbraid men, as to endeavour to amend what I find amiss.

II. I come now to the second head of my discourse, viz. *That when a man's conscience is truly awake, and well informed, he will not scruple to confess his sins, and take shame to himself.* “Be not ashamed when it concerneth thy soul,” was the advice of a Wise Man.”

If any thing concerns a man's soul, the bringing him to a sense of his errors,—the persuading him to give glory to God in an humble confession of them,—the making him an example of repentance to others,—does certainly concern the soul of every one who has fallen into any grievous sins. And yet how few are there, who do, out of choice, take this way (when there is scarce any other) of appeasing the anger of God? And how many are there who will venture their souls, rather than cheerfully submit to the wholesome discipline of the Church of Christ? What strange unthoughtfulness is this!

A man that sins without blushing will yet pretend to be ashamed to do penance; he will not scruple to offend God, but he thinks it too much to let the world know that he is sorry for it. But then we are sure, that such a man's conscience is neither well informed, nor well awake. For a man that believes the Gospel will hardly imagine,



that the hiding or the disowning his sins in this world will make his account *the less hereafter*.

Now, this being a matter of great concern to the souls of men, it will become me to be very plain and particular upon this head of *church censures*, and the necessity there lies upon all who have deserved them of submitting to them out of a *principle of conscience*, and not out of fear of *finer* or *imprisonments*. And I am the more obliged to do this, because this matter is not well understood by many, and not well received by most, who should understand better things.

And, in the first place, St. Paul faith expressly, "That the governors of the church have a power from Christ;" what this power is we learn from other places of the Scripture. First, it is a spiritual power, the princes of the Gentiles exercise authority over them, (faith Christ) but it shall not be so among you.<sup>\*</sup> Your authority shall be purely spiritual; a spiritual House, as the Church of Christ is called by St. Paul,<sup>†</sup> must have spiritual governors.

And their *Power*, as is plain from the Gospel, consists in these following particulars:—They are to receive into the house or church of God, such as are fit to be members of so holy a society. For this end they had the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (that is, of the Church of Christ) given them, to admit such as are worthy and desirous to enter into it.

After this, their *Duty* is (for they have a duty and burthen as well as a power) their *duty* is, To teach and to exhort with wholesome doctrine;—to tell men what they ought to do to be saved;—to pray for the souls committed to their charge;—to support, and to comfort the weak;—to offer to God the oblations of the people;—and to administer those Sacraments, without which we cannot hope to be saved.

Besides these parts of their office, they have power given them by Christ, who well foresaw, that many would embrace Christianity who would afterwards be a scandal to it; he therefore gave the governors of his church power, after they have *rebuked, admonished, withstood* the disobedient and profane, to cast them out of his family, the church; with this assurance, that whatever they did on earth in the way of their duty, should be made good in Heaven.<sup>‡</sup>

In the time of the Apostles, and a long time after, Christians were so far convinced of this, that sinners durst not live in disobedience to their spiritual Pastors, in matters

relating to their spiritual welfare; though there was then no law to punish them for such contempt. Nay, the laws and government then encouraged men to despise and resist their spiritual guides, whom they punished with imprisonment, fines, and death: And yet Christians were more afraid of their censures then, than now men are of imprisonment.

An instance we have, in the fifth Chapter of St. Paul's first Epistle to the Corinthians, of this submission: A man who had embraced Christianity, led by his former lusts, would needs marry his father's widow. He was censured for this fault, and turned out of the church; he had no dependance in the world upon them that did this; all that they could do was to represent to him the dangerous condition into which he had brought himself; and, if he had pleased, he might have despised their counsel, and taken his own ways:—But observe what he did; he was so well satisfied that what his spiritual governors had done would most certainly shut him out of Heaven,—and that whilst he was out of the church he was out of the way of salvation,—that he falls into a deep sorrow for his sin, submits himself to the orders of the church;—and the governors of the church, being satisfied with his penitence, received him again into their society, where he might perfect his repentance; absolved, and comforted him.<sup>§</sup>

Now; what is it could prevail with men to submit to persons, who to the eye of the world had no manner of authority over them? But that all Christians were then satisfied, that no man had a share in the blessings which Christ had purchased to his church, but such as submitted to the lawful governors of his church, in things spiritual. Pray consider, from whom do you receive baptism? From whom do you receive the Lord's Supper? From whom do you receive instruction to life eternal?

And are not *we* as much the Ministers of Christ when we rebuke and censure the wicked, and turn out the obstinate and profane, as when we baptize and receive men into Christ's church,—as when we pray for, instruct, and comfort, the faithful? And will not Jesus Christ hear us, and confirm our sentence, as well as hear our prayer?

For God's sake, be not so perverse as to think otherwise.

We profess to have no power given us by Christ, *but for your edification*; that is, to build, and to establish you in godliness.

We pretend not to any power to *lord it over God's heritage*; but this is the power

we

\* 2 Cor. 13. 10. † Matth. 20. 25. ‡ 1 Pet. 2. 9.

‡ Matth. xviii. 18.

\* 2 Cor. ii. to ver. 10.



we have from Christ:—*To rebuke*, and that with authority,\* as very well knowing that God will warrant us in what we do in his name, and for his honour.

We have power to deny the Sacraments to all such as render themselves unworthy of them.

We have power to shut men that are obstinately wicked out of the church, that they may no longer scandalize the Christian profession; and to charge all other Christians not to accompany with them. And those that will not obey, do not reject our authority, but the authority of Christ.

Lastly; We have power to receive the penitent, to absolve, and to comfort them.

And the same Lord, who gives us this power, gives all penitents, who submit to it, an assurance that they may depend upon what we do in his name. “Whatsoever ye loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven.” “Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them.”

And now, though many people, for want of knowing these truths, (though they are all Scripture truths) and though many, out of a profane and worldly spirit, do set at nought and make light of church censures;—and though too many, God knows, submit to them out of fear of the temporal laws only, and not out of submission to Jesus Christ, and obedience to his Ministers;—yet, as sure as any thing we preach is true, this is true,—That they who have been guilty of any scandalous crimes, and do not repent, and openly, if required, confess their sin and their sorrow for having done despite to the grace of God,—for having broken their baptismal vow,—for having brought a scandal upon their Holy Religion;—such persons have no hopes of mercy and pardon from God.

And those who find ways to escape the censures of the church, by leaving their place of abode, or their country,—by prevailing with officers, whose duty it is to present them, to pass them by,—or by any other way,—such persons are in the same sad condition;—they are exposed to the wrath of God, and no man can promise them any hopes of pardon without publick acknowledgment of their crime, and such as the church appoints.

On the other hand:—All such who have had the misfortune to fall grievously, and come to be truly humbled for their offences, and submit to take shame to themselves, and to give glory to God in a free confession of their crimes;—acknowledging that God is more to be feared than all other powers

on earth, and his judgments dreaded more than death; (which is truly giving glory to God) whoever does this in sincerity may be confident, that the absolution he receives here will most certainly be confirmed in Heaven.

From all which you may see, that if the Ministers of Christ's kingdom should neglect their duty, and should forbear to call notorious offenders to publick penance;—though they should (which God forbid) be partial; and favour some for their own, or for their friends' sake, or for the place they bear in the world; yet this would indeed be no favour at the last, unless we shall think it an advantage to avoid that shame in this life, which we have justly deserved, to meet with shame, and misery, and confusion of face, for ever and ever, in the next world.

*Shame and sorrow* are the due reward of our sins, and we must suffer them either here or hereafter. And we know that those that have found ways to avoid the censures of the church, and the shame and affliction that attend them, have visibly been given up to bring double shame and sorrow upon themselves in this life, that their souls might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

It was a just sense of this which has ever prevailed with wise men, when they have fallen into any grievous crime, not only to submit with patience, and great meekness, to the judgment of their spiritual governors, but even to desire to be made publick examples,—that they might obtain the prayers of all good Christians, that they might receive absolution, and have one of the greatest comforts and assurances which Christ has given to his church.

They did not look upon themselves, nor did ever any good Christian look upon them as worse, but in a much better and happier condition, for having submitted to shame for the glory of God.

And I hope a time will come, when all Christians will have the same thoughts of the discipline of the church;—which God grant in his own good time!

In the mean time, we must not neglect to tell you the truth, whether you receive it or not; for what is it we get by your obedience, but only the blessing of being instrumental in saving your souls? We desire not to lord it over your consciences;—we desire you to submit to the laws of Jesus Christ, not to any rules of ours, which he has not plainly warranted;—in one word, we only desire to be helpers forward of your salvation, which you all hope for, as well as we.

\* Tit. ii. 15.



To conclude:—It is to be hoped, that all such as submit to do penance, submit out of a principle of conscience, and in hopes thereby to find God, for Christ's sake, more favourable to them.

But because we are but too apt to deceive ourselves, I must add further, (for the sake of all such unhappy people as do things worthy of publick penance) that their submission and outward tokens of sorrow will not be accepted as any amends for their crimes, unless it proceed from an humble and contrite heart.

Hear how the penitent in the text speaks: "And Achan answered Joshua, and said unto him, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and thus and thus have I done."

This humble confession shews, that it came from his very heart; and the danger he exposed himself to by making it shews, that he feared the sentence and judgments of God more than either shame or death.

We have no power to inflict such punishment, nor any temporal evil; therefore we had need to be more earnest with penitents, not to deceive the church or themselves with false appearances.

People may submit out of fear, and forget all their promises of amendment when that is over; but then they forget their own souls.

Penance is designed to make men better; and if it does not do that, it were better it had never been performed.

If an inward change of heart, and an outward reformation of manners, do not follow, all your promises are lies, and all your sorrow is vile hypocrisy.

And therefore a person that has any fear of God in his heart, after he has humbly

confessed his fault,—begged God's pardon for having done dishonour to his authority;—asked forgiveness of the people;—obtained absolution from the Priest, the Minister of Christ;—he will, from that day forward, resolve to live more circumspectly;—pray constantly to God for grace, without which we can do nothing;—attend the church and service of God duly;—avoid all temptations to impiety, and especially drunkenness, which makes way for all manner of villainies;—and if he falls into any one sin, he will immediately repent and forsake it, that it may not make way for a greater.

And he that does so, will have great reason to bless God that he has had his lot in a part of the Catholick Church, where the discipline is kept up, the censures executed, and sin openly, as well as in private, rebuked.

And all wise and good men will be so far from despising those that thus humble themselves, that they will receive them with open arms, and esteem them the better, as the Father did his Prodigal Son.

And now, I pray you all to join with me in these petitions,—That God of his goodness would be pleased to continue to this part of Christ's Church, the power and the spirit of discipline;—that he would restore godly discipline to all Christian Churches;—and that he would vouchsafe, unto all that are engaged in sinful courses, a true sense of their errors, true sorrow and repentance for them, and his gracious pardon, that God may be glorified in their confession, amendment, and salvation, for Jesus Christ's sake.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour, thanksgiving, and praise, now and for ever.



## S E R M O N XCIV.

A FUNERAL DISCOURSE.

## THE CONSIDERATION OF DEATH PUT INTO PRACTICE.

O LORD of Life and Death, dispose, by thy grace, all that shall hear this discourse, that, remembering our sentence is already pass'd, our whole lives may be a worthy preparation for death. Deliver every soul of us from the blindness of trusting to a death-bed repentance.—Let me not speak to others upon this serious subject, and forget it myself. And when this sentence shall be executed upon me, be Thou, O Jesu, my mighty Protector.

2 KINGS XX. 1.

*Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order, for thou shalt die, and not live.\**

GOOD Christians; I take this occasion, when most people *are, or should be,* serious, to speak to you upon the most serious subject in the world, and a subject which concerns every soul of us, as much as our life is worth.

I would desire you, and I would charge it upon myself, to consider seriously, WHAT IT IS TO DIE,—and WHAT PREPARATION IS NECESSARY FOR AN HAPPY DEATH. For sure we need not be told, that if death surpriseth any man before he be *prepared* for it, “It had been better for that man if he “had never been born.”

The text I have made choice of is a message sent by the Prophet Isaiah to King Hezekiah: “Thus saith the Lord, Set thine “house in order, for thou shalt die, and “not live.”

We little think of it, and yet indeed this very sentence is already passed upon every one of us. It is true, we know not when it will be executed, but executed it *will* be, and that in a very short while.

It behoves us, therefore, to be prepared for it; “to set our house in order,” while we have time, while we are in our right mind, and have our senses and thoughts about us; always remembering, that it will be no proper time, when we come to die, to ask this question, “What must I do to “be saved?”

The Spirit of God has already told us *this*: “Pass the time of your sojourning “here,” that is, your whole life, “in fear,” with a great concern for what must become of you when you die.

That we may all do this more effectually, I will set before you,

First; *What our condition and business in the world is.*

Secondly; *What alteration death will make in our condition.*

Thirdly; *What preparation for death will be necessary, to make our life easy, and our death happy.*

Lastly; I will set before you, *the different thoughts and reflections of dying persons, both of good and bad, that we may be warned betimes, what to choose, and what to avoid.*

I. And *first*, we shall consider, *What our condition and business in this world is.*

As for our condition; we are by nature born in sin; and subject to the punishment of sin, which is misery and death.

This punishment and sentence we cannot hope to avoid, it being passed upon us by a most righteous Judge, and never to be reversed. Yet this comfort we have still left us, that God has been so good, for his Son's sake, as to make a further trial of us, and to place us in this world in a state of probation, in order to try our obedience, and to mend our nature. And has given us this assurance, that if, during this short life, we give such proof of our obedience, as that our nature is thereby mended, and that we have sincerely endeavoured to be restored to the image of God, in which we were created, we shall, whenever we die, be received into that heavenly state which our sin had made us incapable of.

All this God has made known to us, in order to awaken us, and to make us careful how we spend this short life.

Now; because our eternal weal or woe must depend upon this trial, God has been

\* See Job xiv. 5. Pf. xxxix. 4. lxxxix. 48. xc. 12. Matth. x. 28. Mark viii. 36. Rom. v. 12. viii. 18. 1 Cor. vii. 29. xv. 56. 2 Cor. iv. 17. Heb. ix. 27. xi. 34. xiii. 14. 1 Pet. ii. 11.



so gracious as to give us laws and rules to live by, which are most proper to cure our corruption, and to fit us for Heaven.

He has also given us warning of such things as will certainly divert us from minding this great work, if we be not careful to avoid them.

He has indeed forbidden us many things; but then they are only such as would certainly shut us out of Heaven.

He has foretold us of the dangers we may encounter, and the enemies we have to struggle with; but then he has assured us of all the assistance we shall at any time stand in need of.

In order to this, he has promised his Holy Spirit to all that ask for him in sincerity; to be an Almighty Principle of a new life, in every soul with whom he vouchsafes to dwell. And he is given to, and will dwell with, every Christian who takes care not to grieve him by his evil deeds.

This is our condition, this is our case:—We are in this life upon our good behaviour;—we are in a state of penance for what is past, and we are upon our trial for the time to come, even for eternity.

And that we may most highly value the love of God, and not think that these conditions are hard, or impossible to be performed, his Son did, in our nature, submit to all this, to convince us, that there is no other way for mortal man to regain the favour of God, but *this*:—To resign ourselves wholly to God's will and pleasure,—to do what he commands,—to avoid what he forbids,—to suffer what he appoints, and to be pleased with all his choices.

So that nothing but an holy life, and following the commands of Jesus Christ, can possibly secure to us the favour of God, or save us from eternal misery when we die.

II. And this brings us to the next thing to be considered, and that is, *What alteration death will make in our condition.*

That it will make a very great alteration, all people are convinced of it;—they *fear*, they *avoid* it; they take all pains to *keep it off*; and they generally *submit to it unwillingly*.

And indeed there is great reason for all this, if people are not prepared for death; or if they have set their hearts upon this world; or if they have not a true knowledge of death, and the reason of it.

If a man is not prepared for death, he cannot but meet it with amazement. *The night is come when no man can work.* His time of trial is at an end. And he has a

summons to appear before the bar of God's justice, in these words: "Careless man! this night shall thy soul be required of thee."

Not less terrible is death to those whose souls are fastened to the world,—by its pleasures, profits, honours, or any other of its idols. So saith the Wise Man: "O death; how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions; unto the man that hath nothing to vex him, and that hath prosperity in all things!"

But if the thoughts of death be so bitter, the sight must needs be insupportable, to a man whose soul was bound up in the world. Forasmuch as death strips him of every thing he valued; of every friend, of every pleasure, of authority, of power, of estate, of every thing in which he placed his happiness.

A great alteration this;—and should in reason teach people to moderate their affections for every thing the world doats on, if it were but to prevent the trouble of parting with them at the hour of death.

But, alas! this is but the least of that anguish which will then seize men, if the love of the world has till then hindered them from loving God, and obeying his laws. A frightful consideration this!—To be going to appear before God, whose laws I have broken and never repented of it, whose promises I have slighted, and whose judgments I have never till then regarded.

But even good men are not altogether without their fears, upon the prospect of that change which death is going to make in their condition,—whether they look upon death, either as painful to nature; or as a just punishment of sin; or, lastly, as a messenger calling them before their Judge. But then *these fears* in good men are capable of being lessened, if not quite removed.

Even a dying criminal, if truly penitent, will comfort his soul with such thoughts as these, and support his spirits against the terrors of death:—"The pains of death will soon be over;—if they were to be longer, they are the due reward of my crimes;—the sentence is righteous, and just, and as such I submit to it, and I cannot but esteem the very Judge who condemned me;—and I am sure that if he knew the disposition with which I receive the sentence of death, he would pity me, though he would not think fit to recall his sentence."

And will not such considerations as these serve to sweeten the approach of death, and strip it of much of its terrors?

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. xli.

For



For suppose a man should thus reason with himself:—‘I know by faith, that death is the fruit and the punishment of sin,—a punishment to which we are all condemned by the righteous judgment of God;—I am therefore bound to submit to it, out of love to his justice;—if I do it willingly, my death will (like that of my Saviour’s) be a sacrifice of obedience to God. And why should I increase my accounts by an uneasy and rebellious temper? Rather let me cast myself on God’s mercy, and, by an humble compliance with his will, I may hope to make some atonement for my sins, which I cannot recall.’

But after all, there is nothing like a sober, and a Christian life, which can give a man any solid comfort, when death calls him to judgment. Not that we are to set bounds to the mercies of God; or, by any means, exclude a sincere and timely repentance. But these are favours in the hands of God, and not to be expected by such as live in rebellion against him.

Let us rather remember what the Spirit saith: \* ‘Thou shalt not know what hour I will come.’ Will it not then be the highest presumption to persuade ourselves that we have time enough to prepare for death, when God himself declares that we have not one moment certain?

III. And this brings us to consider, *What preparation is necessary to make our lives easy, and our death happy.*

And first let us remember, that life was given us for this very end, To make trial of our behaviour here;—and that by an holy life, and a careful preparation for death, our souls and bodies may be a worthy sacrifice to God, when he shall think fit to call us out of this world.

In the next place; let us fix this in our minds, and never forget it, That *now* is the time, in which we are to choose *where* we are to be, and *what* we are to be, for ever. And for our encouragement let us be assured, that a timely preparation for death will arm us against the fear of death, and against all other fears whatever.

But forasmuch as THE PREPARATIONS OF THE HEART ARE FROM THE LORD, from Him we must ask this grace; and we must ask it with great earnestness, as a grace without which we shall perish everlastingly.

We must beg him to remove all those hindrances, which may divert us from considering our latter end, and from preparing for it.

And because the love of the world is the greatest of those hindrances, we must beg

\* Rev. iii. 3.

of God, in the first place, to give us the eyes of faith, that we may see the world just as it really is;—the folly of its pleasures, the vanity of its promises, the shortness of its rewards, the multitude of its snares, and the dangers of its temptations.

When once we shall be well convinced of this, we shall be better prepared to fix our hearts upon the happiness of another life, and to love that good God, who has prepared such happiness for them that in this world strive to please him.

The way to do this, and to be so far prepared for death, is, in the first place, to have our worldly affairs, as much as possible, in that order, that we may not only have discharged a good conscience in disposing of them; but, by declaring what we owe, and what is owing to us, we may prevent disputes, and preserve peace and charity among those we leave behind us.

And, forasmuch as GOD has expressly CHARGED THEM THAT ARE RICH, THAT THEY BE READY TO GIVE, AND GLAD TO DISTRIBUTE; and all others are exhorted to be merciful after their power; and God having declared, that with such sacrifices he is well pleased;—that he will not forget this labour of love; that is, their works of charity;—and that this is the laying up for themselves a good foundation, a growing stock, for the time to come. All this, I say, shews, that it is an indispensable duty,—a duty most pleasing to God,—to be all our life long, as well as when we come to die, giving to the poor, according to our ability, and the good disposition which God shall give us.

This is called in Holy Scripture, LENDING UNTO THE LORD; so that we are sure of a good paymaster; and it will still be better for us, if the payment is deferred till after our death.

And indeed this is so necessary a preparation for death, that it is called, A GATHERING TO OURSELVES A GOOD REWARD IN THE DAY OF NECESSITY; than which none sure can be greater than the day of death.

And therefore most thoughtful people, lest they should be wanting in this duty, do follow the Apostle’s advice, and “do regularly lay by them in store, according as God has prospered them,” that they may have to give to them that need; and “that the Lord may deliver them in the time of trouble,” as he has promised to do.\*

The next care of every Christian who desires to be always prepared for death, must be, to see that his faith be such as it should be. A firm faith in God’s Word, in his promises and threatenings therein contained;—

\* Ps. xli.



a firm faith in *Jesus Christ*, his only Son, and our only Saviour;—and that God will, for his sake, be reconciled unto all such as with hearty repentance turn unto him;—lastly, a firm faith in the *Holy Ghost*, and that *he* it is who enlightens the minds of such as fear God, and that he works in them all good dispositions, and enables them to follow that which is good, “and that God “will give this Holy Spirit to them that “ask him.”

Whoever has this faith, and a full resolution to order his life accordingly, always bearing in mind what the Apostle assures us of,<sup>2</sup> that *Eternal Life* will be the portion of those only *who, by continuance in well-doing, seek for Glory*;—such a person, we say, is in a very good way of preparation for death.

But that he may continue in this good way, it is also absolutely necessary, that he close with the means of grace which God has ordained for our salvation. That he attend the church carefully; that he hear God's Word reverently; that he constantly pray to God; and that especially, whenever the memorial of Christ's death is celebrated in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, he receive it with great devotion, as the most *sovereign medicine* for all the diseases of the soul, and especially against that universal disease, *the fear of death*.

He that expects to have Christ his Saviour when he dies, must devote himself entirely to God while he lives, and very seriously resolve, that nothing in this world shall prevail with him to do what he believes will displease God.

Particularly, he will submit patiently to God's will under all trials and afflictions, because they are of God's ordering.

He will depend upon God's good providence, both for delivering him out of danger, and for supplying all his wants; and he will have great regard to every thing which has any relation to God; by which he will recommend himself to God's favour at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

And, that he may have as little as possible to answer for with respect to *his neighbour*, he will endeavour to be just in his dealings, —will neither take, nor detain, nor so much as covet, what is another's.

He will be faithful to his word, and keep his tongue from evil-speaking, lying, and flandering, and will readily forgive as he hopes for forgiveness from God.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. ii. 7.

He will strive to be at peace with all, and will be obedient to his governors and pastors; and he will endeavour to do all these things with this view, TO PLEASE GOD. And then he is sure to have God pleased with him.

With regard to himself, he will keep a strict watch over his senses, lest intemperance get the mastery over him;—and, above all things, he will be afraid of growing lukewarm and indifferent for Eternity, lest he should be surprised by death when he least thinks of it.

Every Christian, who has been so happy as to lead such a life as this, will have reason to hope well for himself, and to trust in the mercy, and goodness, and promises of God, when he comes to die. He knows that the STING OF DEATH IS SIN; that therefore an holy life must be the best security against the fear of death.

And whoever has not been so happy as to lead such a careful life, has no other way to secure himself against the fear of death, and the very dreadful consequence of dying unprepared, but to make his peace with God by a timely repentance,—by not delaying to do it one moment.

In order to this, let the number of sudden deaths oblige him to count himself to be one of those who is to be surprised by death; which, if any thing, will force him to set about making the best and speediest preparation he can.

And this must be, by not hiding, but confessing the sins of his life past;—by judging and condemning himself for them;—by putting on the most solemn resolutions of living more christianly for the time to come;—by begging God's pardon and gracious assistance, to enable him to make good his resolutions.

By keeping these resolutions in his mind, and calling himself often to an account, and warily avoiding temptations to the sins he has been most subject to;—by making restitution, as far as it is in his power, for any injuries he has done to others, and forgiving all such as have injured or offended him, as he himself expects forgiveness at God's hands;—by endeavouring to make such as he has drawn into sin, if it be possible, sensible of their danger,—at least to beg of God to touch their hearts most powerfully from above, and to pardon their sin.

Whoever does this in the sincerity of his soul, God will graciously pardon what is past; and if he afterwards continues to live in the fear of God, he will certainly, when he dies, die in the favour of God. For this favour, this mighty favour, *Jesus Christ*



has obtained for all true penitents with the price of his own blood; for which we can never be sufficiently thankful.

And this brings us to the last thing which I proposed to lay before you, in order to awaken, to encourage, and to force Christians to prepare for death; which was,

IV. To set before you, *the very different thoughts and reflections of dying persons, both of good and bad men*, that you may resolve this day, what you will choose, what end you will make.

Suppose, therefore, you should hear a dying sinner thus *expostulating* with himself, thus *lamenting* his sad condition:—  
 ‘God forgive me, how sadly have I spent the greatest part of my life!—What a sad end is this of all my pleasures, to be now tormented with the remembrance of them, and with the dread of what I am like to suffer for them!—I have led an idle and a useless life: How dreadful are *now* those words to my soul, which till now I never minded:—*Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness!*—What madness was it to spend a life in sin and vanity, which was given me to prepare for this sad hour!—How have I despised and turned my back upon the poor members of Christ, when God gave me enough for them and for myself too!—How much have I spent upon myself in clothes and luxury, which would have kept many a one warm, and filled many an hungry belly? Oh the folly, the madness of pride and intemperance, which I could never see till now—till *now*, when it is too late to see it to any good purpose!—Would to God I had never seen those wretched people, who tempted me to sin, to revelling and drunkenness, to whoredom and intemperance.’

‘What signifies (saith another) the estate that I have got by *injustice*, by *fraud*, or *oppression*? It is now a plague to myself, and will too likely be a curse to my children, for whose sake I took such ways to get it. It is not *now* in my power to make amends for the injury I did my neighbour in his body, goods, or good name. How shall I answer it to God, before whom I am going to be judged?’

‘The estate, (says another) which my ancestors left me, has been a snare and a curse to me; but so I made it myself, my wretched self. The authority and power which I was so fond of, do now serve only to torment me, because I used them so very ill.’

‘I have been careful, (saith another) for every thing, but for my soul. I have been afraid of every thing else, of poverty, of

‘shame, of afflictions; but I never feared for my soul till now, when my fears only serve to torment me. How often have I shut my ears, and turned my back upon God, when he spoke to me, by his Ministers, by afflictions, by my own conscience! And now he is going to call me to an account for my perverseness!—Happy had it been for me, if I had given credit to God, to his Ministers;—if I had *believed*, and *repented*, and had brought forth fruits meet for repentance. But, alas! I slighted the worship of God, his Word, and Sacraments;—I joined with those fools who counted the life of the righteous madness;—but now he is comforted, and we are tormented. Oh! that God would spare me, I would not *now* stick to take shame to myself, for such a scandal I gave to the Church of God. I would repair such and such injuries;—I would never neglect the occasions of serving God.’

Why now, Christians, God spares you, and me, and every one who enjoys life, for these very purposes:—To repent of what we have done amiss;—to lead a new life, as a proof of the sincerity of our repentance;—and to make our peace with him before we go hence and be no more seen.

Thus I have laid before you, some of the thoughts of those who have never thought of death till they are upon their sick bed,—till the number, the weight, the wilfulness of their sins, awaken them into fears which no mortal man can describe.

And it is this horror and anguish of dying sinners, which one would endeavour to prevent by all the arguments that are likely to awaken men;—that we may all without delay, who have not already done it, set about that work, which we shall otherwise sadly wish we had done, when perhaps it may be too late to do any thing but to bewail our folly in a miserable eternity.

On the other hand; a Christian, of a sober and thoughtful life, will strip the approach of death of most of its terrors, by such reasonings as these:—‘The sentence of death is already passed upon me, I cannot avoid it;—I confess with the penitent thief, that I suffer justly the punishment of sin;—I do acknowledge the justice of the sentence, and will resign myself to it after a Christian manner. It is now my comfort, that God has had some portion of my time and thoughts; and, since he has given me time and grace to make use of it, I will comfort myself as Manoah’s wife did:—“If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have shewed us all these things.”’

\* Judges xiii. 23.

So



So faith the humble, penitent, dying Christian:—‘If God has given me an opportunity of renewing my vows, and a will to do it;—if he has accepted my alms and my good deeds, by giving me an heart to do such;—if he has opened mine ear to discipline, and has chastised me with the chastening of his children;—why, then, I have good hopes, that his graces are not in vain, but that he will crown them with pardon, favour, and happiness eternal. I will therefore with an humble confidence lay hold on the promises of God to sincere penitents, *I know* (with St. Paul)<sup>b</sup> *whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day.* It is true, I am to be stripped by death of all my worldly enjoyments; but I am not without hopes of meeting with much greater. I leave my children behind me; but I comfort myself in this, that I took such care of their education, that I hope to meet them in the Paradise of God. All my trials and afflictions are now to end; now they appear as blessings which God made use of to prepare me for this hour. I will therefore endeavour to meet my death as a deliverance from sin, from banishment, and from captivity, and as a passage to a much better world.’

After all;—he that hath lived the best life will stand in need of mercy at the hour of death. And even the greatest sinner has not sinned beyond the power of grace, and the efficacy of the blood of Christ, provided he defer not his repentance.

In one word; THE STING OF DEATH IS SIN. It is that which makes the very thoughts of death a torment to us. Therefore, a Christian life is the only cure for the fear of death, and for that great change it will make in our condition.

And now, good Christians, you see what a dreadful folly it is, to live as if we had nothing to do in this world; or, as if we were to live here for ever. You see what a change death will make in our condition. No more to be done;—too late to repent, to wish, to resolve, to promise, to do any thing.

And be assured of it, that it is no matter how a man spends his life, if he is not preparing for death and for eternity.

In the death of others, we see what we ourselves are, and what we must come to. Could we see the world as we shall judge of it when we come to die, there is nothing in it that would tempt us to hazard our souls for.

<sup>b</sup> 2 Tim. i. 12.

You have seen a child extremely fond of his play-things, and impatient to part with them. An hour after he falls sick, you strive to please him with the things he was just now so fond of;—he lets them drop out of his hand, and will not so much as look on them.

Why indeed, Christians, this will be the case of every one of us, when we come to die;—we shall despise, we shall loath, we shall hate, the very things which now keep us from preparing for our latter end.

When we see others go before us, we are apt to bless ourselves, that it is not our lot, and that we are yet alive. But, for God’s sake, where is the comfort, if we make no good use of the time which God still continues to us?

And let me take good notice of it; That though the death of others does not much affect me now, yet it must come to be my own case, and when it does do so, it will be of the greatest moment to me, whether I am to be happy or miserable for ever.

It is our great comfort, that our time is in God’s hands; that nothing can deprive us of life without his leave. So that we may be sure, if we are in the way of salvation, when he calls for us, it will be well with us, though we have not done all that we could wish we had done.

This, I say, is our comfort. But then let us not delay one moment to put ourselves into the way of life, lest death should overtake us unawares.

Let us ever remember, that we shall rise out of the grave just as we go into it, either favourites or enemies of God to all eternity.

In one word;—let us be persuaded to live like Christians, and then we may every one of us say with St. Paul, TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.

And, O God! grant, that what has now been said may contribute something to that blessed end; and that I myself, and all who have heard me, may remember, that our sentence of death is already passed,—that therefore we may make the remainder of our lives a worthy preparation for death.

Deliver every soul of us from the blindness of trusting to a death-bed repentance; and fix this truth in all our hearts, *That if we live without care, we shall die without comfort.*

Now, to God the Father, the Son, and Holy Ghost, be ascribed all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.



## S E R M O N XCV.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF MR. EVAN CHRISTIAN.

## THE HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO DIE IN THE FAITH AND FAVOUR OF GOD.

R E V. XIV. 13.

*I heard a voice from Heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

I HAVE made choice of this part of the office for the Burial of the Dead, for our present meditations, *not without very good reasons*, and which you will easily apprehend without much insisting upon them.

For instance: You will conclude, that when I chose these words, I did believe them very suitable, and applicable in an especial manner, to the person who now lies dead before us; and indeed so I did—otherwise I should have abused a sacred text of Scripture to ends very unworthy of a Minister of God.

But besides this, I had in my thoughts the present times of sickness and mortality, in which it has pleased God to visit very many families.

I considered how natural it was for people to be concerned for themselves, when so many about them are taken away, and even some upon very short warning.

I concluded with myself, that if ever sober reason would take place with people, it would surely be received when they were under apprehensions of danger; for so saith the Prophet of God: “When thy judgments are in the world, the inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness.” Then, or never, they will be serious and thoughtful.

I was sure, that the danger of dying under the displeasure of God was more to be dreaded than any calamity that could possibly befall a mortal man. I knew very well, that *this consideration, and this only*, makes death truly terrible;—makes the loss of our friends more sensible and afflicting, and our own lives no better than a burthen to us.

Upon the whole, I did conclude, that certainly here is a just occasion offered us, of considering how all these evils may be prevented;—how the bitter thoughts of death may be sweetened, and become ac-

ceptable;—how we shall be gainers, *if it is not our own fault*, by that change which we so industriously avoid;—and lastly, how our departure hence may be matter of comfort, instead of sorrow, to those we leave behind us.

All which I shall endeavour to shew, from the words just read to you, *Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord*; that is, happy are they who die in the faith and favour of God.

They are happy upon many accounts, but chiefly upon these two;—in that now *they rest from their labours*, they are set free from all the burthens of a mortal life;—they are no longer subject to temptations, or the danger of being overcome by them;—they are freed from diseases, and the uneasiness that attends them;—grief, and cares, and sorrows, and persecution, are all at an end;—or, as Job very elegantly sets forth the condition and state of the dead: “There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor.”

But all faithful Christians are much more happy upon another account:—They are not only freed from outward calamities, and inward sorrows, but they are put into a condition of present happiness. *Their works do follow them*, or (as perhaps it should be rendered) *do accompany them*, as witnesses, or proofs, of their having been faithful stewards of the talents committed to their charge.

I need not spend time in proving this:—That good men, after death, are at rest, and in a happy condition. The Spirit of God has expressly said it;—and Christians are so generally persuaded of the certainty of it, that every one for himself hopes that rest and happiness shall be his own portion at the last.

\* Chap. iii. 17.

Now,



Now, if people did not very often deceive themselves in these hopes and expectations, there would be no need of so many cautions in Holy Scripture given to Christians, not to deceive themselves with vain hopes.

But the Spirit of God, which knows what is in man, foresaw, that when eternal happiness should be offered to all men, who should qualify themselves for Heaven, a great many would think themselves secure of happiness who will have no reason for such expectations, besides a very natural desire of hoping well for themselves.

That I may therefore set this matter in as clear a light as the time will allow me to do it, I will endeavour to explain the meaning of this expression in the text:—*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.*

I. And in the first place, it is plain, that the blessedness here spoken of is designed for *those*, and *those only*, who die in the Lord. All others are excluded. Neither the *tears* nor the *prayers* of their friends,—nothing that can be done for them;—no, not the goodness and mercy of God, which is so often depended upon even against his express word:—None of these will avail us, if *we die not in the Lord.*

For the same Spirit of Truth, who for our support and encouragement has made known to us, that the happiness which God has prepared for his faithful servants is *inexpressibly great*;—the same Spirit of God has declared, that those who in this life have no regard to the commands of God, shall in the next be most *miserable*, and for ever *undone*.

“Be not deceived;” (saith the Apostle)  
“neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God.”

Be not deceived: Why, who ever gave such people hopes that they might be happy after death? Nobody: but their own deceitful hearts made them to wish what was impossible, that they might enjoy their lusts in *this* life, and the happiness of Saints and Angels in the next.

II. But, secondly, not only wicked men, who *depart this life* in their sins unrepented of, are certainly shut out of the Kingdom of Heaven; but even such as have nothing else to depend upon but a *death-bed repentance*, their condition is deplorable beyond expression or remedy.

St. Paul’s commission, from Jesus Christ himself, was this: That he should endea-

your to open the eyes of the Gentiles to whom he was sent, “to turn them from darkness “to light, and from the power of Satan “unto God.” Accordingly, he preached every where, that *people should repent, and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*

Here are works to be done after we have repented, *that is plain.* Do but add our Saviour’s words to these; *the night cometh, when no man can work*; and you will see whether a Minister of Christ can speak comfort to such as never think of preparing themselves for Heaven till they come to die, or whether such can hope that they *die in the Lord.*

One would not limit the mercies of God, nor discourage people from detesting their *insensibility*, their *carelessness*, their *abominable wickedness*, their *strange unfruitfulness* under the means of grace which God has afforded them:—One would not discourage people from confessing these, and detesting them even in their last moments.

But this is what we can only say to them after all: They are not within the covenant of grace,—they have not done works meet for repentance. The promise is to *these* and to *these* only.

If God, who sees their sorrow, and knows what is in man, and what would have been the effects of *that sorrow*, if he should have given them a longer time,—if *he* will accept of such repentance as this, they will have the greater reason to be eternally thankful;—but this is what he has given us no authority to declare in his name, in order to comfort people at the hour of death.

The *will of God is*, That all who call themselves Christians should honour him in their lives,—should avoid those things that are contrary to their profession,—and follow such things as are agreeable to the same;—that they should repent when they have done amiss, and *repent* in time, that they may manifest the sincerity of their repentance, by continuing in the practice of holiness unto their lives’ end.

To these he has promised favour and mercy for Christ’s sake, though their sins have been many, and their best works imperfect.

As for all others, they have neither grounds for their hopes of pardon, nor promise of any reward, but that of wicked servants.

III. We must add, in the last place, *That not only notorious sinners, but even unprofitable servants, will be excluded from entering into the joy of their Lord.*

There are people who verily believe that all is well with them, and shall be well with them at the last, because they cannot charge

\* 1 Cor. vi. 9. \* Acts xxvi. 18.



charge themselves with *drunkenness, perjury, whoredom, extortion, violent oppression*, and the like crying sins. Or, perhaps, they have *repented* of these crimes, and resolve to be guilty of them no more. Why, truly, this is very commendable, and a hopeful step towards gaining the favour of God.

But this is not all that is expected from those that hope to *die in the Lord*. There are things *to be done*, as well as things which *ought not to be done*, by the faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

One would wonder how so many people come to be persuaded, that a life retired from the world, and spent in devotions, should be most acceptable to God. Pray what were we sent into the world for? Was it not to try how we would behave ourselves in it? How we would use the talents, or opportunities of doing good, which God has afforded us?

Now if, instead of doing this, we resolve to get out of the world as much as we can, and do little or no good in our generation, under pretence of avoiding temptations, (as if God could not defend us in every state his providence calls us to;) or under pretence of serving God more devoutly, (as if God were not to be served in works, as well as in words;) or lastly, under pretence that God does not expect it from us: 'I am not made for *business*;—I love *retirement*;—if I take care of one, that is all I can do.' Such resolutions as these will deceive us at the last, and will stand us in no stead, when we shall appear before God, to be rewarded or punished.

I say not this without good authority.

Do but consider with me *the words of the text*, and let us apply them. *Blessed are the dead*. What, all the dead? No; but they *that die in the Lord*. And who are they? Why, those whose works *accompany them* into the other world.

Then let us every one ask himself this question, What have I done which may witness for me before God, *that I loved him with all my heart*;—that I feared to offend him;—that I put my whole trust in him;—that I did him honour in the world?

These are the duties we owe to God, and it will be expected from us, that we have some proof along with us of our having done these. And it will not be sufficient to say, We have *heard thy word*, and *prayed* in thy name. The answer is already given, *Do not even the publicans the same?*

And if the same questions are asked with respect to the duties we owe to our Neighbour, we shall then be better able to judge

how we shall appear in the presence of God. "For if our hearts condemn us, God is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things; but if our heart condemn us not," (after we have taken pains to search its state) "then may we have confidence towards God," that he will not be severe against us.

From what has been already said, you will easily perceive, that it is plain folly to expect to die the death of the righteous, when one has not prepared himself by an holy life for such a happy change.

IV. And this brings us to consider *what those things are, which, at the hour of death, will make the great difference betwixt the blessed and the miserable*.

And though I must not say, *it is their good works* which will render the righteous acceptable to God, for that is a doctrine very contrary to God's word;—but this I must say, (for so saith the Spirit of God) that their *good works must follow them*, must attend them, as *evidences* and *testimonies* of their *repentance*, and *faith* in God, and of their charity to men *for God's sake*.

Having these witnesses of our sincerity, we may plead with God for his promises in Jesus Christ, and hope to be accepted.

For instance:—I may depend upon the *sincerity of my repentance*, if with an honest heart I can say, that I have been truly careful in calling myself to an account, and in examining into the state of my soul;—that I have endeavoured to avoid falling into those sins which I have repented of; and taken such methods for avoiding them, as are most likely to secure me against such relapses.

I may with truth say, that I love God, if for his sake, and for securing his favour, I have renounced my own corrupt inclinations, been concerned to do his will, and keep his commandments;—if I have been afraid of doing what might displease God, and have been ready to suffer any inconvenience rather than do what I believe will offend or dishonour him.

I may be assured, that *my faith* will be approved of God, if it shall appear that I have received all the truths of the Gospel, as coming from God, with great thankfulness and humility; and that I have endeavoured to order my conversation so as to be agreeable to the Gospel I have professed to believe.

As to the duties which I owe to my Neighbour:—If I have really performed them, I shall have something to witness for me, that I have done so;—if I have been poor, for instance, and have not endeavoured



to better my condition by unjust ways; or, if I have been rich, and have not assumed such a property in what God has given me, as to neglect to dispense them for his honour, and the good of my fellow-creatures;—if God has given me *authority*, and I have not abused it; or *means of doing good*, and I have not grudged my time and pains, or laid up my talent in a napkin;—if I have kept my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity, as becomes the temple of God, for so the Holy Spirit is pleased to honour us:—All these virtues will be my witnesses, that I *lived and died in the Lord*, and that I shall be eternally happy with all such as have done so before me, or that shall so live after me.

I shall not say how much of this character belongs to this good man whose remains lie before us. It is so natural to apply every thing said at this time, that is pious, or praise-worthy, or of good report, that I am confident you have all made an application already suitable to his deservings.

I shall only add, that he is going to the grave with such a *character* amongst men, and such a *testimony* of good works attending him, that, when God thinks fit to call for any of us, the very best of us may with his case may be *ours*.

He lived to a good old age, or, as it is elegantly expressed in the Book of Job,<sup>f</sup> *He is come to his grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in his season.*

He neither shortened his days by intemperance, nor was he overmuch concerned to live any longer, than while he could be of use in his generation.

He did all the good he could, for his country, for his family, for his friends, and for his neighbours. In short, he has been a common benefactor to this poor place, and his loss will be sooner felt than made up.

Would to God I could persuade many of you that hear me, to follow his example. And why should not we all do so?

His education was not above the common rate of his neighbours: But this should convince us of a truth, which too few take notice of, that holiness of life is the only sure way to wisdom and a sound judgment of things. Under this disposition of mind, every thing we read, or hear of, or meet with, will afford matter of useful improvement.

I am sure this was the way this good man took; having subdued his will and affections to the rule of God's commandments, by this means his faculties were enlarged, and his understanding disposed

for, and stocked with, abundance of useful knowledge, such as would surprise and edify those who knew him intimately.

Let us now leave him and his good works, which shall either accompany or follow him, in the hands of his Creator, to receive that blessing which his well-beloved Son shall pronounce to all that love and fear him, saying, "Come, ye blessed children of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."

And let us in the mean time return to ourselves and to our text. And from what has been said, let us at least make this just inference:—That it is not our believing or not believing these important truths we have been speaking of, that will make these truths of more or less concern to us. If God has determined to deal with us, when we die, according to the works done in the body, which works will follow us whether we will or not;—if he has prepared a place of happiness for the righteous, and a place of torments for the careless and the wicked;—then these things are true, and will come to pass, whether we believe, whether we think of them or not.

It is true, we may find out a thousand ways to divert our minds from thinking of these things;—we may put the evil day far from us, notwithstanding the many objects of mortality which we see and hear of:—But then this is not what wise people should do;—it is to do that very thing which foolish, unthoughtful people have been used to *speak*;—it is to *take a leap into the dark*, without considering, that such as do so will most certainly light in the *lake that burneth with fire and brimstone*.

From which *place and fate*, the God of mercy deliver us, and from *that* unthoughtfulness and *that* wickedness, which infallibly lead to it.

Let us remember, that nothing that is impossible, or that is unreasonable, is expected from, or required of us, in order to obtain that blessedness here spoken of.

We approve of and we praise those virtues in others, which qualify them for Heaven; and why should we not imitate them?

In short; imitate them we must, or we shall never attain that happiness *they* enjoy, and *we* hope for; nor escape that punishment which they are freed from, and which we dare not think of without the utmost dread and terror.

To conclude:—Those who can despise the happiness of Heaven, and the torments of Hell, are proof against all other arguments which can be made use of for their conversion.

Preserve

<sup>f</sup> Chap. iv. 26.



Preserve us, O God, from that strange madness of being only concerned for this life, without providing for an everlasting well-being,—that making good use of the time which Thou vouchsafest us here, when we come to die, we may be received into

thine everlasting kingdom, with all those that have died in the true faith and fear of God. Grant this, O merciful God, for Jesus Christ's sake. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

## S E R M O N XCVI.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF OLD MRS. MURRAY.

THE HAPPINESS OF THOSE WHO DIE IN THE FAITH AND FAVOUR OF GOD.

R E V. XIV. 13.

*Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.*

**I**T was with great reason, that our Church (directed by the Spirit of God) made these words a part of her office for the burial of the dead.

Either *relation*, or *friendship*, or *decency*, or *custom*,—some consideration or other,—brings always a number of people together upon these occasions.

And the very occasion itself is apt to make most people more serious and thoughtful than ordinary.

And the whole office is designed, and is most proper, to improve our seriousness to the best purposes, particularly these words I have made choice of for your present meditations; not, I hope, without very good reasons.

For, in the first place, every body who knew the person whose remains now lie before us will, I am persuaded, conclude, that I have not made an improper choice of a subject for this occasion.

If an unblemished character,—if a good life, (the best proof of a sincere faith)—if a most commendable industry, which yet never hindered her from attending the publick worship,—if a peaceable and inoffensive conduct, which appeared in her having scarce an enemy in the world,—if a most tender care and concern for her family and relations,—and yet a most remarkable patience and resignation to the will of God, upon the loss of so many hopeful children taken away in the bloom of their years:—Lastly; if an exemplary temperance, which, through the blessing of God, preserved her health, and lengthened her days to an uncommon age;—if such virtues as these will justify us in applying the general promises of the Gospel to particular cases and persons,

I shall not be judged to have misapplied a sacred text to purposes unworthy of a Minister of Christ.

But the Church had a further design in the choice of this Scripture for this office. She considered the case of the living in that of the dead; as also what generally comes into the thoughts of serious people upon the death of their friends:—That now their condition is unalterably fixed; they are either happy or miserable, and sure to be so for ever.

She would have, therefore, all her members admonished by this so often repeated portion of Scripture, so to lead their lives, as that their friends may have comfort in their death.

And she would have their friends, as St. Paul exhorts us,<sup>e</sup> not to be overmuch concerned, “not to sorrow as men without hope, for them that sleep in Christ;” since we have the Word of God for it, that such as are dead in the Lord are blessed and happy.

Besides all this, I had in my thoughts a too general delusion of Christians, who are but too apt to hope well for themselves, very often without reason and without Scripture; who hope, who expect, to *die in the Lord*, in the favour of God, and to be happy when they are dead, without considering what sort of works are like to follow them: As if those awakening words of the God of Truth did no way concern us:<sup>h</sup> “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”

Upon the whole, I did conclude, that certainly here is a good occasion offered us,

<sup>e</sup> 1 Theff. iv. 13. <sup>h</sup> Matth. vii. 14.



of considering how this evil may be prevented;—how the bitter thoughts of death may be sweetened;—how we may be gainers (if it is not plainly our own fault) by that change which we so industriously avoid;—and lastly, how our departure hence may be matter of comfort, instead of sorrow, to those we leave behind us.

All which I shall endeavour to shew from the words just now read to you; which are introduced after a very remarkable manner: I HEARD A VOICE FROM HEAVEN, SAYING, WRITE, (write this that follows, as most worthy to be transmitted to all future generations) THAT BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD; that is, in the Christian faith, in Christian communion, and in Christian charity, accompanied with good works and an holy life; such are certainly BLESSED; THEY REST FROM THEIR LABOURS; they are freed from all the burthens, temptations, and troubles of this mortal life, from outward calamities, and inward sorrows; AND THEIR WORKS DO FOLLOW THEM, as witnesses and proofs of the good use they have made of the *talents*, the *life*, the *health*, and all other means of glorifying God, and doing good in their generation, which God has vouchsafed them.

I will not take up your time in proving the very different portions of good and bad men in the state after death; the certainty of which, the happiness of the one, and the misery of the other, being as unquestionable, as that there is a God, and as that *this* word of his [the Bible] is true.

Both good and bad men acknowledge this. The good hope and pray for a place in the Paradise of God; and the wicked confess this, and will be judged out of their own mouths, when they curse their enemies to the pit of hell, as supposing it to be a place of misery and torment.

It will be of more use to consider who *may*, and who *must not*, hope to be happy when they die;—*who* are sure to be miserable after this life, and *who* they are who are as sure to escape the bitter pains of eternal death. Some certainty in *this* is surely the most desirable thing in this world. It is not *I* who must pretend to give you this certainty and satisfaction; but *God*, and *his* Word, you *may* depend on.

\* IF THOU WILT ENTER INTO LIFE, faith the God of Truth, KEEP THE COMMANDMENTS. And again, THEY THAT HAVE DONE GOOD, SHALL GO INTO LIFE EVERLASTING; AND THEY THAT HAVE DONE EVIL, and have not repented, SHALL GO INTO EVERLASTING FIRE.

You will be apt to say, Who does not know this? Be it so. But then the gene-

ality of Christians do not consider, that to say they know this, and yet live as if there were not one syllable of truth in it, must be most provoking to God, and of most dreadful consequence to those that are guilty of such perverseness.

But how shall we know that our faith, and repentance, and works, will be acceptable to God? This brings us to consider what those things are, which at the hour of death will make that vast difference betwixt those that are to be blessed, and those that are like to be miserable.

And though we must not say it is merely their good works which will render the righteous the objects of God's mercy, (for that is a doctrine contrary to God's word;) yet this we may say, because the Spirit hath said it, that their good works must follow, or accompany them, as evidences of their repentance, and faith, and charity; and that having these witnesses of our sincerity, we may plead the promises of God in Jesus Christ, and be assured of being accepted.

For instance:—I may depend upon the sincerity of my repentance, if I can say with truth, that I have been careful to call myself to an account, and to examine into the state of my soul;—that I have avoided, as much as possible, falling into the sins which I have repented of;—that I have kept out of the way of temptation, and never think of my past offences but with sorrow, concern, and reproaching myself. THIS IS A REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE NOT TO BE REPENTED OF.

And then I may, with truth, say, that I love God, if for his sake, and for the securing his favour, I have renounced my own corrupt desires and inclinations, and all those evil habits which I had unhappily contracted;—that I am resolved to do his will, as far as it shall appear to me to be the will of God;—that I am heartily concerned when I am sensible I have done otherwise, and resolve to do so no more;—and lastly, that I am resolved to suffer any inconvenience, rather than do what I know will either offend or do him dishonour.

In the next place, I may be confident, that my faith will be approved of God, if I have received the truths of the Gospel, as coming from him, with humility; and have endeavoured to order my life according to that Gospel which I profess to believe.

As to the duties which I owe to my Neighbour and myself; if I have really performed them, I shall have something to witness for me, that I have really done so.

If I have been *poor*, for example, and have been content with my condition as



ordered by providence, and have not attempted to better it by any unjust ways;—or if I have been *rich*, and have not assumed such a property in what God has intrusted me with, as with his steward, so as to neglect to make use of it to his glory, and the benefit of the rest of his family;—if God has given me *authority*, and I have not wilfully abused it; or opportunities and means of *doing good*, and I have cheerfully laid hold of them;—if I have kept my body in temperance, soberness, and chastity, clean and pure, as the temple of God ought to be, (for so the Spirit of God is pleased to honour us, and to call our bodies the temples of God;)—These all will be witnesses that I have lived, and SHALL DIE IN THE LORD, and shall be blessed and happy with all those that have had such works attending them into the next world.

Let us now take a view of those whose bad works do follow them; for the Scripture assures us, that both good and bad works do follow, and are to be judged in the life to come.

Let us set before our eyes the case of one, who, when he comes to die, can scarcely comfort himself with any good he has done in the world;—who has trifled away his whole life and time in doing nothing, or, what was worse than doing nothing, who has spent that upon himself, which might, and ought to have been the support of many besides;—who never concerned himself with what others either suffered or wanted;—who followed his pleasures continually, indulged all his appetites, and never knew what it was to deny himself what his soul desired;—who cannot truly say, that he ever took any delight in the worship of God;—that what he did in that way, was to comply with custom, or to avoid reproach. Consider whether you would be in such a man's case for the whole world!

But consider it to purpose;—resolve that from the moment you are convinced of this, you will, through the grace of God, make a good use of your time, do all the good you can, that you may have something to comfort you on your death-bed.

But there are abundance worse cases than that we have been speaking of. Suppose then, that you should see another just ready to depart this life; one who had done abundance of mischief in his time;—who had done a great deal of wrong, because it was in the power of his hand to do it;—who had spent his riches in the service of hell;—who, by a bad example, had corrupted others, and been a means of their damnation;—who, by propagating wicked principles, had led men into the ways of error and destruction.

Or, if you should see another, who had all his life long despised the worship, the ordinances,—profaned the name, and the Sabbaths of God, and rendered religion contemptible.

If you should see others, who had been heaping up riches, right or wrong; and others gaming them away in the midst of oaths and curses;—lastly, if you should see others making a mock of sin, a jest of the crimes of whoredom, drunkenness, and blasphemy, which ought to make every Christian tremble, instead of countenancing them.

Do but for one moment consider the case of such people when they come to die, and you will conclude, as our Lord did of him that betrayed him: IT HAD BEEN BETTER FOR THESE PEOPLE IF THEY HAD NEVER BEEN BORN;—better that they had been the poorest beggars, the most miserable creatures on earth.

And now, (good Christians) you see who are excluded from this blessedness faithfully promised to such as die in the Lord. So that neither the tears, nor the prayers, of those they leave behind them, can any way help them.

This cuts off all the vain hopes of those deluded Christians who promise themselves Heaven and Happiness, either from a death-bed repentance, or from the mercy and goodness of God, or from the prayers and other good offices of their friends after they are dead.

A death-bed repentance is the most uncertain comfort, and not to be depended on. The mercy of God may be so far abused as not to be expected. And the Holy Scriptures are express, that they are not the good works of those who pray for us when we are dead, but the good works that we ourselves have done in the body, that must follow and witness for us before our judge.

This shews the evil consequence of that doctrine, and the sad delusion of those that trust their salvation upon it, and to those they leave behind them:—As if any man would be more concerned for my soul, and do more for me, than I would be persuaded to do for myself.

In the next place, consider, my Christian brethren, that it is not our believing, or not believing, or not minding, these important truths, that will make them of more or less concern to us.

If God has determined to deal with us when we die according to our works done in the body, which works will follow us, whether we will or not,—either to plead for, or condemn us;—then these things will  
come



come to pass, whether we believe; whether we think of them or not.

No thoughtful Christian, one would hope, would flatter himself, that his time, his repentance, his salvation, is in his own hands. "To-day," saith the Spirit, "if you will hear his voice," his call, "harden not your hearts." This then is the time of trial, of grace, of repentance, of mercy, and of securing our salvation.

No wise man, therefore, will, if he can possibly help it, lose the sight, the thoughts of death; it being that which must determine his fate for ever. And what an astonishing thing it must be, to be surprised, either in a course of sin, or in the midst of pleasures, or in an utter forgetfulness of God, you have already heard!

Since all our hopes consist in dying in the Lord, the great concern of our whole life ought to be a preparation for death. And then you will strip death of all its terrors; you will consider it as a most righteous sentence, passed upon you (as it is upon all mankind) for our sins. And that a willing submission to this sentence will be accepted of God, in union with that of Jesus Christ, as a full satisfaction for all the sins you have repented of. That, therefore, (if it has not been your own fault) death will be no more an evil to you, than the release of a prisoner,—than the calling home of one who had been banished,—than the putting an end to the miseries and afflictions of a mortal life, and the giving a man a passport to a much better world.

This will be the consequence of a true Christian faith, supported by an holy life. And this, I persuade myself, is the happy condition of our deceased friend.

Some perhaps, would take it ill, that a person of so private a life and character should be proposed as an example and pattern to those of her sex.

I would only desire such as think so, at their return home, to read the last chapter of the Proverbs of Solomon. There they will find the character, the praise, and properties of a good wife.

And they that were acquainted with this good woman will be surprised and pleased with the very many singular instances in which she exactly followed the pattern there set her.

Would to God the age would bear to be advised to follow that pattern so well as she has done!

Let us now return to ourselves, and seriously consider, That we are in this life in a state of trial;—that this trial is for eter-

nity;—that our present life is continued to us only that our nature may be mended, and that we may be made capable of that blessedness which we were created for.

Let us farther consider, That we shall rise out of our graves just as we go in, either the objects of God's mercy, or of his wrath;—that happy is he whom death finds rich in good works, no matter what his outward condition has been till then;—and that miserable, very miserable, must be the condition of that man, whom death overtakes, either doing evil, or doing nothing that he should do.

Believe it, Christians, for a certain truth, that when you come to die, your thoughts will not be: What a figure have I made in the world;—how pleasantly have I passed my days;—how plentifully have I lived;—what pleasures have I enjoyed;—what rare friends have I had;—what an estate have I gotten;—and what wealth do I leave behind me?

No, no. But such as these following will be your dying reflections, if you do not stifle them: How have I spent my life;—how have I employed my time and my health;—how have I improved the talents with which God intrusted me;—what good have I done in the world;—have I brought up my children in the fear of God;—have I been kind and helpful to poor and needy people, according to my ability;—have I been true and just in my dealings;—have I lived in the fear of God, and worshipped him both in publick and private, according to my ability;—and, lastly, have I taken pains to be doing something good all my life, pursuant to that sentence of God, passed upon me, and upon every soul of man, whether rich or poor,—“In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread?”

These, I say again, will be the thoughts of such as die in their right mind. And to such whose consciences cannot answer for them, that something like this has been the tenor of their past life;—to such as have led an *unthoughtful, fearless, useless, sinful* life, and are just going into eternity, what arguments can be thought on to comfort them?

Believe it, believe it, Christians, that when that day comes, the stoutest heart amongst us cannot, without the utmost astonishment, bear the thoughts of being shut out of Heaven.

And now, if you have attended to what has been said, you will see reason not to be over-fond of a world and its pleasures, which you must leave so very soon; nor to omit those opportunities that God has put

<sup>1</sup> Gen. iii. 19.



into your power of doing some good in your generation,—those good works which will so very soon stand you in stead, and witness for you, that you have not been an useless part of the creation, an unprofitable servant, whose sentence is already passed, and dreadful to be thought of.

Some are apt to think themselves much overlooked by providence in this world, not considering, that the blessedness of the next world will make them sufficient amends.

Others are (as they think) so happy, that they wish never to die. But believe it, my Christian brethren, believe this important truth, which I would leave with you, as never to be forgot, *that our happiness or misery does not begin till after we are dead.*

May God give us all grace to think of this, with the seriousness of Christians who hope for salvation; that we may die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory, for Jesus Christ's sake. To whom, &c.

## S E R M O N XCVII.

AT THE FUNERAL OF MRS. SUSANNAH MURRAY.

THE TRUE FOUNDATION OF COMFORT ON THE DEATH OF FRIENDS.

I T H E S S. iv. 13, 14.

*I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus (that is, in the faith of Jesus) will God bring with him.\**

**T**HIS is the mighty difference which death makes betwixt true Christian Believers, and Infidels or Libertines.

When the first come to die, they are able to say with St. Paul, "I know whom I have believed;"—they resign their souls into the hands of God, who is able to keep them; trusting in his mercy, and goodness, and promises, in Jesus Christ, both at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment.

And their friends, which they leave behind them, HAVING HOPE IN THEIR DEATH, consider them as freed from the miseries of *this life*, and as gone to a much better:—With which considerations they endeavour to assuage their grief, and to bear with patience and resignation the chastisement which God in his wise and good providence has thought fit to lay upon them, to be sure for their good, if it is not their own fault.

On the other hand, THEY WHICH HAVE NO HOPE; that is, no knowledge of what must come hereafter, no faith in God's Word; or have not regarded it;—These, when death approaches, are either *stupid*, or *hardened*, or *given over to a reprobate mind*, a mind void of judgment; or, if their consciences are not seared, they are under the greatest perplexities, fears, astonishment, at what may very soon be their portion; and

no mortal man can tell what to say to comfort them.

And such friends as they leave behind them are either overwhelmed with sorrow for what may too likely be their lot;—or they part with them with despair of ever seeing them again;—or they blame themselves for having not done all that was in their power to keep them from the pit of destruction.

So very great a difference does death make, both with regard to the living and the dead, betwixt Christians and Infidels, betwixt good and bad livers.

Now; the great design of the subject I have chosen, being to comfort all Christians upon the death of such persons as have been very dear to them; I would from hence take occasion to exhort you all, good Christians, to take care to lay a *sure foundation of comfort* for yourselves, and for those you shall leave behind you.

This is to be done by a TRUE REPENTANCE, and by an HOLY LIFE; these being the fruit and effects of a true and saving faith.

Whoever promises you pardon and peace upon any other terms, does but deceive himself and you, to his own and your eternal ruin.

\* See Prov. x. 7. xi. 7. xiv. 32. Jer. xviii. 12. Ephes. ii. 12. Heb. vi. 18, 19. 1 Pet. i. 21. 2 Tim. i. 12. 1 John iii. 3.



And yet nothing is more common than to hear people speak their comfortable hopes of their departed friends, though they have lived in sin, and have left no sign of virtue and piety behind them,—only because they were become serious at the sight of death, which the most abandoned sinners can hardly choose but be.

St. Paul's commission from Jesus Christ himself was this:—That he should preach (and accordingly he did) every where, *that men should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.*

Here you see, (Christians) here are works to be done after men have repented. And then, if we add our Saviour's words,<sup>k</sup> *THE NIGHT COMETH WHEN NO MAN CAN WORK*; we shall easily see what a madness it must be, to trust the great concern of our salvation to a death-bed repentance.

We must not indeed limit the mercies of God, nor discourage people from *confessing* and *detesting* their sins and unfruitfulness, under the means of grace, even at their last moments. But then this is only what can be said to them after all,—They having not done works meet for repentance, their case must be left to the uncovenanted mercy of God, who, under the Law of Moses, reserved to himself certain cases, for which no sacrifices were to be offered by his Priest:

The will of God is, That all who are called Christians should honour him in their lives, and should improve the graces he bestows upon them,—should crucify the flesh with its affections and lusts, “That they may be meet to be partakers of the inheritance with the Saints in light.”

And if people will deceive themselves either with the bare name of Christians,—or will depend upon a faith, which does not purify the heart,—or trust the care of their souls to those they leave behind them,—they will run the greatest hazard of being shut out of Paradise when they die.

To prevent this as much as possible, and *that we may all have comfort in the death of our friends*,—I would apply myself,

*First*; To such of my own Order as hear me, and to whom Jesus Christ has committed the care of the souls which he has purchased with his most precious blood;

And *Secondly*; to such as have any manner of authority over others, whether *Magistrates, Parents, or Masters*, who all have it in charge, and, through the blessing of God, in their power, to hinder people from ruining themselves and others; to the sad sorrow and grief of those who have any serious concern for their friends' everlasting welfare.

<sup>k</sup> John ix. 4.

And *first*; Every Clergyman, who knows what a frightful and difficult part of his duty it is to deal with *HABITUAL SINNERS* upon the bed of sickness, should be at any pains to prevent so afflicting and uneasy a work; and which only can be prevented by dealing with such people very often and plainly, while they are in health;—By representing to them the danger they are in, while they live in open rebellion against God, and in defiance of his laws;—that as sure as there is a righteous and omnipotent God, he will punish them—for the abuse of his good creatures,—for defiling their own bodies, which at their baptism were made temples of the Holy Ghost,—for tempting others to sin, and being accessory to their eternal ruin,—for mispending that very time which God has given them in which to work out their salvation,—for the evil example they give, or for leading an idle and an unprofitable life;—and that all this while they are under the displeasure of a God who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

By doing this often, a Pastor will keep the fears and consciences of such sinners awake. They will at least sin with uneasiness; and, finding that the ways of sin are *a state of real slavery*, they may at last resolve to seek for that ease and peace, which is only to be found in the ways of God's commandments.

After this, a faithful Pastor will endeavour to drive such sinners from all their holds of false hopes, and vain purposes—*OF REPENTING TIME ENOUGH BEFORE THEY DIE*, as if sinners could repent when they please; or as if, by deferring their repentance, they might not at last provoke God to give them over to a reprobate mind.

He will convince them, that they have no reason to depend upon the mercy of God, if it does not lead them to repentance;—and that there is certainly the greatest evil towards *that man*, who sins and prospers in his sin, it being a sign of God's greatest displeasure, and that such a man is left to himself:—A condition the most to be dreaded of any thing in this world.

That, notwithstanding all this, if a sinner is truly sensible of his sad condition, in having been in the hands, and power, and a slave to Satan, and desires to return to God and to his duty; he ought to be assured, that *that desire is from the good Spirit of God*; and if he closes with it, God will receive him into favour upon his true repentance.

We have the Word of the Son of God for it: “*VERILY, ALL SINS SHALL BE FORGIVEN UNTO THE SONS OF MEN*,”—to

<sup>1</sup> Mark iii. 28.



encourage the greatest sinners to apply to God for mercy and pardon, and not to defer doing so one moment.

If to this, a faithful Pastor would add his own most earnest prayers in behalf of such sinners; beseeching God, over and over again, to touch their hearts most powerfully from above; to take from them all that obstinacy and blindness which hinders their conversion; he would not so often have reason to be concerned and sorrowful for so many of his flock, nor repeat those words *in the office for the dead* with a *sad heart and doubtful mind*, "That we may rest in Christ, as our hope is this our brother does."

At least, a Pastor will have the comfort of having done his duty, and that the blood of those that perish will not be required at his hands.

But there are another sort of people, though not such profligate sinners, who are yet in the way of perdition, and which a Pastor ought to make them sensible of, lest he mourn at the last, when it may be too late to recover them. And these are, such FORMAL CHRISTIANS AS HOLD THE TRUTH IN UNRIGHTEOUSNESS; who perform the common duties of Christianity without concern to do them well, or without being bettered by them;—who profess to believe in God, without fearing to offend him, and in Jesus Christ, without feeling the necessity of a Redeemer.

In short; who hope to go to Heaven when they die, with the indifference of one who never considers THAT WITHOUT HOLINESS NO MAN MUST SEE THE LORD.

Such *formal, indifferent, thoughtless* Christians should be made sensible of the absolute necessity of an *inward conversion* of the soul to God, as well as of an *outward Religion*.

And as an *outward Religion* is not, at our peril, to be neglected, being ordained to honour God, and to create and keep in our hearts a lively sense of his majesty, and to obtain his graces; so neither is it to be depended upon, unless it lead us to love God with all our soul, and to keep his commands, in order to restore us to the image of God in which we were created, and without which we must never hope to go to Heaven.

A Pastor, who does this faithfully, will have no reason to *sorrow as those that have no hope for such of his flock as sleep in Christ*.

The next who are most capable of laying a good foundation of comfort and happiness both for the *dead* and the *living*, are *Christian Parents*.

Most parents are concerned for their children's present well-being; and too often forfeit a good conscience rather than not provide for them;—while too few are careful to give them such instructions, and such examples, as, by the grace of God, might secure them an inheritance in Heaven when they die.

And so it comes to pass, that, instead of comfort, they often have the torment, the *sorrow*, of seeing them in the way of ruin while they live, and of misery when they die.

And although this cannot always be helped, even by the most sober parents, yet they ought not, at the peril of their own souls, to neglect all that is in their power; namely, to see they be instructed in the principles of the Christian Religion,—to pray for them every day of their lives,—and to be sure that they pray for themselves;—and to take great care that their natural corruption be not strengthened and increased by evil examples;—that they get not habits of *vanity*, of *idleness*, of *pride*, of *intemperance*, of *lying*, of *fraud*, or of *uncleanness*, under their own eye, or through the examples they themselves set them.

When they are grown up to years of discretion, they should be brought to the Ordinances of Religion, and made to understand them;—to *Confirmation*, and to the *Lord's Supper*;—that once understanding the promises and threatenings of the Gospel, they may not fall into sin without the checks of conscience, and a fear for themselves.

And when parents are providing for their children, the Wise Man's maxim should be always before their eyes: "Better is a little with righteousness," that is, honestly gotten, "than great revenues without right." Remembering, that when a canker goes with a portion or an inheritance, it is generally the ruin of whole families.

Lastly; such parents as *squander away their inheritance* should seriously consider, (if such people ever do consider any thing) that they tempt their children to curse their memory, and to imitate (as far as they leave it in their power) and follow their extravagant ways; and, which will still be the conclusion, they will have no comfort in them, living or dying.

On the other hand; where people live in the faith and fear of God, whether they live or die, their friends find motives of comfort in them.

If they are in pain of body, or under affliction of any kind, they comfort themselves with this certain truth, "That whom  
" the



"the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth;" and that afflictions are more a sign of God's love, than of his anger.

Afflictions, indeed, bring us the nearest way to God. Even Death itself, the greatest seeming affliction to human nature, is a sure passage to a much better life and world than this we are in, if it has not been entirely our own fault.

Would you then strip death, with all the train of afflictions leading to it,—would you strip them of all their terrors, then look on it in this view:—As it is a sacrifice for sin, which God will mercifully accept of, in union with that of Jesus Christ, if we prepare for it, and submit to it as a penance due to our offences.

In this view, death is only the deliverance of a prisoner,—the recalling of one from banishment,—the end of all miseries,—and a passage to another world.

With these considerations, good Christians will comfort their souls upon the bed of sickness.

But how shall we comfort those who *feel*, who *smart* under, the loss of their departed friends?

We must ever despair of doing it by such arguments as human reason may suggest. And indeed we do not want them, since God in his Holy Word has furnished us with so many and more effectual.

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS, saith St. Paul, in the close of this chapter. What are these words? Why; with the assurance, the infallible assurance which God has given us, THAT SUCH AS SLEEP IN JESUS ARE HAPPY beyond what we can imagine or describe;—that they are out of all manner of danger of ever mis-carrying;—and that, if we endeavour to follow their good examples, we shall meet them (and that very soon) in peace and happiness which will never end.

Now; that this is the happy condition of her whose remains lie before us, they, who are most apt to bewail their loss, have all the reason in the world to know and believe it assuredly.

They know how well she answered the character of a prudent wife, of a careful tender mother, of a kind mistress of a family, of a good and charitable neighbour, and with what prudence and piety she has governed her children and family.

She had from a child been bred up in the fear of God; and when she became a mother of children, it was the great concern of her life to make a grateful return to God for

that mercy, by endeavouring to bring up her own children after the same godly manner.

If we consider her loss in this view:—What she was, how she lived, and what she now is,—it will lead the most sorrowful of her relations to bless God for his mercies and graces vouchsafed unto her while she lived, and for the good use she made of *them*; and to endeavour, as far as human nature will suffer them, to resign *their will* to the *Will of God*, who never did, never will deprive his servants of any thing in this world, but when he sees it will be for our good, if we resist not his will.

Nay, we may venture to say, that he deprives us of nothing but what in his infinite wisdom he sees would make us more unhappy.

This will be acknowledged by every body who knows, (and who does not?) that the very best of men do stand in need of warning to consider their latter end;—to remember that this is not the world they were made for;—to lay up their treasure in Heaven betimes, that their hearts may be there before they die;—that they want very strong motives to wean their hearts from a world which they are apt to be too fond of, and which yet they must leave very soon.

And lastly; most Christians want to be endued with such habits of patience and resignation to the Will of God, as may render death, with all the miseries that generally lead to it, less frightful and amazing. And nothing sure so proper to effect these good ends, as such mournful occasions as this before us.

But such providences as these are very proper to instruct and edify others as well as those that are most nearly concerned in her loss.

Here is a person taken away, who wanted no worldly comfort that her heart could wish, (if any worldly thing could have satisfied her.) Beloved by her *husband*, by her *children*, by her *friends*.

Will any body, who considers this as they should do, set their heart upon so vain, so slippery, so uncertain a world, and its satisfactions?

But then, observe the power of grace, which, in the midst of all these enjoyments, could make her think of leaving them, as indeed she did, with great resignation, in hopes of a better inheritance.

You see, my brethren, the mighty power of a true Christian faith, and that it enables us to find comfort, and even satisfaction, in the greatest temporal evils;—that it renders death itself, the very King of Terrors, far



far from being frightful to such as die in the Lord;—and is so far from depriving those that survive of all comfort, that it fills their souls with joy for the well-grounded hopes it gives them of the happy state their friends are in.

Be persuaded, therefore, good Christians, to leave your friends this comfortable legacy, when you die; namely, the comfort, the sure and certain hope, that you are going to a place of *rest*, and *peace*, and *happiness*, where you will be out of the reach of trouble, of temptations, and of danger, and out of a possibility of displeasing God any more.

This we hope, we are verily persuaded, is the case of our departed sister and friend; for we may very truly reason, as the wife of Manoah did with her husband,<sup>m</sup> when he cried out for fear, “we shall surely die, because we have seen God.” “If the Lord,” said she, “were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt-offering at our hands, neither would he have shewed us all these things,” all these favours.

Even so we reason:—If God gives his children grace to hearken to those that are ordained to instruct them;—if he opens their ear to discipline, and they are obedient to the heavenly call;—if he gives them opportunities of doing good in their generation, and grace to make use of them;—if they submit to his fatherly chastisements, and are bettered by them, as becomes the dutiful children of so good and kind a Father. All these are sure grounds for a Christian to hope, that these graces have not been given in vain,—but that God designs, and will crown them with pardon, favour, and happiness eternal.

<sup>m</sup> Judges xiii. 23.

This, we say, is the comfort of all God's servants, whether of those that die, or of those that lament the loss of their dear friends.

On the other hand; with what a sad and heavy heart must they leave the world, who, looking back, can see nothing in their whole life, but what must render them unworthy of the mercy of God;—who have lived an idle, useless, careless life, and are cut off in their sins;—who are going to appear before a Judge, whose Laws they have broken, whose graces and favours they have set at nought;—who have done little or no good in their generation.

What sorrowful dying thoughts must such people have!—What little comfort and hope will their surviving friends have!

But this is a subject too foreign and too mournful to be insisted on, upon this occasion. I only hint it, that such as have any degree of seriousness may think in time, and to some good purpose, what an ill-spent life must end in.

As to our sister and friend, we hope, and we believe, that none of the graces which God vouchsafed her, were lost upon her;—that she died in the true faith and fear of God, after a well-spent life;—that she is gone to appear before a Judge, whom she endeavoured, by a sober and useful life, to make her friend;—and that she is happier, where she now is, than ever she was in this world.

May we all bless God, for such good examples, and endeavour to imitate them, that we may one day meet in the Paradise of God, and be made partakers of a blessed Resurrection,—for the Lord Jesus' sake. To whom, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.



## S E R M O N XCVIII.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF THE REV. THOMAS ALLEN, VICAR OF KIRK-MAUGHOLD.

THE PROPER DUTY OF CHRISTIANS IN GENERAL, AND OF THE MINISTERS  
OF CHRIST IN PARTICULAR.

JOHN xvii. 4.

*I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.*

THESE are some of the last words of our Blessed Saviour, and spoken just before he laid down his life for us. As he was Man, he had a Work given him by God to do, and to finish, before he should leave this world.

It was to make known the Will of God to fallen Man,—that God would be reconciled to Men upon certain conditions, which he had declared to them. And especially he was to make known to them, that God would call all men to an account; and adjudge them to happiness or misery, according to the works done in the body. This work our Lord declares he had finished; and makes it the subject of his rejoicing before his death.

Now; although the best of men come infinitely short of this pattern, yet every Christian is bound, at the peril of his soul, to strive to come up to it; that is, *to do his duty in that state of life unto which it shall please God to call him.*

And yet this is a matter so seldom laid to heart, *at least so seriously as it ought to be*, that most people look upon their time as their own, to be disposed of as *they* please; and that they are at liberty to choose what work pleases themselves, not what the providence of God had given them to do.

So that the account men are to give of the work they have done, is too often the least and last of their thoughts. And yet all Christians own, that upon this depends their everlasting happiness or misery.

And every Christian, as he hopes to die in peace, and in the favour of God,—as he hopes for Heaven,—ought to live so, as that when he comes to die he may be able to say, *“I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do;”*—that is, according to the allowances made by our merciful God to human frailty, I have been doing my duty, the work which the providence of God appointed me. I was sensible of my own weakness, and therefore I always prayed for

his grace and assistance, that I might do my duty so as to please him. I found myself too often wanting to my duty; and as often as I did so, I begged his pardon, and endeavoured to amend where I had done amiss: And this has been my constant care.

Whoever cannot say something like this to himself when he comes to die, will certainly die either with a *feared*, or an *uneasy* conscience.

I do not say this to *terrify* any sincere soul, who, though late, has repented of his *unprofitable* or *idle* way of living; and is now working out his salvation with fear and trembling. If his repentance be sincere,—that is, if he is bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, answerable to amendment of life,—he may comfort himself with the assurance of mercy, and pardon, and happiness.

But what I aim at is, to awaken such sinners as are manifestly in the way of perdition, and not to suffer them to go on without shewing them their danger and their ruin. Such, for instance, as never think of the account they are to give,—never mind their salvation,—put off their repentance and conversion from time to time, till it may be too late to do them any good.

Now; the way I would take to awaken such sinners into a sense of their danger, is this:—I would endeavour to convince, (and may the grace of God make my endeavours effectual!) I would, I say, endeavour to convince you *and myself*, of the real danger every Christian is in, *who is not actually doing the work which God has given him to do.*

And this we shall see very plainly, if we will but consider these following truths: That all mankind are under the sentence of certain death, ready to be executed at an hour we know not of;—that this short and uncertain time allowed us, betwixt the sentence and execution, is to determine our condition to all eternity;—because, during this time, we have a work appointed us to

finish,



finish, which, if not done, we shall be treated as wicked, unprofitable servants; that is, "We shall be cast into outer darkness, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth."

Now; can any Christian, who believes these truths, (and they are as certain as that God is true) can any Christian think of these things, and not resolve thus with himself:—"By the grace of God I will endeavour to *know* the work which God has given me to do; and I will set about it with all my might, lest death overtake me before I have finished it?"

Now; to help forward the meditation of every one who is thus disposed, and to open the eyes of such as are not, I will lay before you these following truths, in as plain a manner as I possibly can.

First; *That every Christian has a work to do, and to finish, before he dies.*

Secondly; *That every Minister of Christ has, besides the work that is common to all Christians, a very great work upon his hands, for which he is to give a most strict account.*

Lastly; *That both the one and the other must expect to meet with difficulties; but, however, this will not excuse them from that work which God has given them to finish, because their salvation depends upon it.*

Let us first consider, THAT EVERY CHRISTIAN HAS A WORK TO DO, AND EVEN TO FINISH, BEFORE HE DIES.

Since the Fall of Man, there is no salvation to be had, but by the Cross; by taking pains to make our peace with God, and to get such holy dispositions as are absolutely necessary to fit us for Heaven. "Work out your own salvation" (saith the Apostle) "with fear and trembling."<sup>a</sup> This shews Christians very plainly, if they will believe the Spirit of God, that we have not only a *work* upon our hands, but a *work* that will make us very serious before we have finished it.

Let us take but a short sight of the particulars which we have to do. We naturally love the world, and we are obliged to labour hard to loosen the ties which fasten us to it; and yet this we *must* do, if ever we expect to love God, on which depends our salvation.

The very best of us have contracted evil habits, and it will take time, and care, and pains, to get rid of them.

We stand in need of the grace of God, every day of our lives; and as we hope for his grace, his blessing, and protection, we are bound to pray for them.

<sup>a</sup> Phil. ii. 12.

We every day receive favours from God, and we have no reason to hope for the continuance of them, if we will not be at the pains to thank him for them.

But this is not all: We have all of us very many enemies to oppose. The *Devil*, a very powerful spirit, walking about continually, seeking whom he may devour, finding them off their guard, or from under God's protection. The *World*, a very corrupt world, perpetually tempting us to follow its ways, which infallibly lead to destruction. And lastly; our *own Hearts*, if we had no other adversary, would ruin us, without a constant care and watchfulness. In short; the difficulties and dangers of this life are so many, that we need not be at pains to go to hell; for if we do not *strive*, and *pray*, and *take pains*, and *make resistance*, we shall too surely go thither of course.

But then, besides these general duties that belong to all Christians, every condition of life, and every Christian man, woman, or child, have some work peculiar to them, and for the faithful discharge of which they must one day surely answer.

*Parents*, for example, stand charged, and must answer to God, for the care they have taken of their children; Whether they have brought them up in the fear of God; whether they have honestly provided for their necessary support; and have not squandered that away in *idleness*, *luxury*, and *vanity*, which should have been *their* subsistence.

And their *Children* no sooner come to years of understanding, but their work grows upon them every day. They must learn their duty;—they must strive to preserve their innocency;—they must keep out of the way of temptations;—they must, as ever they hope to be happy, deny themselves a great many things, which their hearts will hanker after.

The *Rich* will have enough to do, to watch against pride, and covetousness, and oppression, and sensuality, and many other hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

And the *Poor*, as little as they may think they have to answer for, have their proper duties and proper difficulties to struggle with. To be content with, and even thankful for, their condition,—not to endeavour to better it by unjust ways,—and so to serve God as to have hopes of an amends hereafter, for what they have wanted here.

In one word; all Christians are accountable for their *time*, for their *talents*, and for the duties of that state of life in which the providence of God has placed them. And such



such as live (as God knows there are too many such) as if they had nothing in the world to do, but to please themselves in leading an idle and an useless life, will one day find, that it had been better for them that they had never lived, that they had never been born.

I have only touched upon these general duties of all Christians, in order to convince such as have any degree of seriousness, that Christianity is not a state of idleness; but that every one who hopes for salvation (and who is there that does not?) is bound to look about him,—to consider seriously, what he came into the world for,—what he is doing,—and what will be expected from him when he dies?

But that which I chiefly aim at in this discourse is, to take an occasion, from this solemn meeting, where one of our brethren lies dead before us, and a good many more are present, to put the living in mind of their proper duty, and of the account we must give when it comes to be with us as it is with our deceased brother. And in doing this, I shall hope to instruct every one that hears and understands me, in some important part of their duty.

OUR BLESSED LORD, whose dying words I have chosen for the subject of this discourse—His great work on earth was to establish the Christian Religion; that is, to put mankind into a way of salvation. In order to this, he took our nature upon him,—he taught us what things are most pleasing to God,—and what God expected from us in order to qualify us for Heaven and Happiness.

He shewed us what things we should chiefly set our hearts on, and what we should avoid, even as death itself. He assured us of the estate of the dead; that some are in Paradise, waiting for a blessed Resurrection, and others reserved in chains of darkness to the judgment of the great day.

He made known to us the spiritual enemies which we are to watch against, and assured us that God would defend us against all their power and malice, if we prayed to him for help, and lived like those that expected God to be their defence.

When he had done this, he laid down his life for us, to assure his poor creatures, that God was thoroughly reconciled to all such as would be reconciled to the way of salvation which he had appointed, and close with it.

And then, to confirm our faith and hope in God, he was raised from the dead; and by that instance, he convinced the world of the truth and importance of all his pro-

mis, threatenings, revelations, commands, and ordinances.

This was the work which our Lord said WAS GIVEN HIM TO DO, and which he declares HE HAD FINISHED.

But then, because this work was to be carried on, and made known to all generations of men, as long as the world should last, he therefore appointed and ordained an Order of Men, whose duty and business it should be,—to publish and preach these glad tidings to all that would receive them;—to pray for, and bless the people in his name, with an assurance, that their prayer of faith should certainly be answered, and that their blessing should have a real effect, where a Son of Peace was disposed to receive it.

But I shall set in order the work of a Minister of God, that you may be convinced how much they contribute to your salvation, and that you may esteem them accordingly.

Their power and commission, given by Jesus Christ, is well worth your hearing. You will find it in the 28th chapter of St. Matthew, and it is as follows:—Jesus, speaking to his Apostles, said unto them, “All power is given unto me in Heaven and in Earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples unto me in all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe whatever I have commanded. And lo!” that is, let the world take notice of it, “lo, I am with you,” that is, with you and your successors, “unto the end of the world.”

The Apostles having received this Commission, for themselves and successors, they immediately set about the work of the ministry, publishing this most comfortable truth,—That God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them;—and that he had committed unto them, to them and their successors, the Word of Reconciliation.\* So that you see very plainly, that your salvation depends, under God, upon the ministry of those whom Jesus Christ has appointed to reconcile men to God.

Jesus Christ knew very well, for he had felt the sad experience of it, to what a perverse world he sent them. He knew likewise, that they were men of like passions and infirmities with those to whom he sent them. And therefore, to secure them as much as possible from contempt, and to oblige all men to hear them with reverence, he declares,† that he will look upon himself as injured in the contempt any man shews his Ministers: “He that despiseth you,

\* 2 Cor. v. † Luke x. 16.

“despiseth



“despise me; and he that despise me,  
“despise him that sent me.”

3. We now come to consider in what their work consists.

And *first*, as stewards over the household of God, their business is to receive into his family, by the Sacrament of Baptism, all such as desire to become members thereof; by which we are put into the way of salvation.

The next is, to convince men, by preaching, that they are sinners;—that *as such*, they stand in need of God’s mercy, for that a day is coming in which God will call all men to an account, and that their works will be judged good or evil, as they agree with, or are contrary to the Gospel.

Therefore, another work of the ministry is, *To study the Gospel*, that we may be able to declare, what it commands, and what it forbids;—to put Christians in mind of their duty, which they are but too apt to forget;—to exhort them to follow it, and to rebuke them when they do not;—to set before them the terrors of the world to come;—and to comfort them with the promises of God in Christ, when they become sensible of their evil estate. What Christian does not see the great blessing of such a ministration!

But this is not all. Christians are subject to sin, and by that to forfeit the favour of God, and to make themselves liable to his justice and displeasure. Jesus Christ, therefore, has ordained a Sacrament of Reconciliation, and has appointed his Ministers the dispensers thereof, to all such as with hearty repentance, and true faith, turn unto God. By which their pardon is sealed, and their graces are increased. Is this a blessing to be despised?

But, besides all this, the Ministers of Christ, as the Priests under the Law, have a *daily* charge upon them. They stand obliged, (and I beseech you, my brethren, to consider this, and lay it to heart) we stand obliged every one of us, either publicly or in private, to offer unto God *daily*, the prayers of the Church, every Pastor for his own flock,—to confess our own sins and the sins of the people,—to give God thanks for the mercies which he bestows upon them,—and to beg God’s protection and blessing upon them and upon their labours. That as they labour for us, so should we pray daily for them;—and that all such as by reason of distance, through necessity, or worldly business, are hindered from coming to Church to pray for themselves, might depend upon the blessing of God prayed for by God’s Minister.

And, as they must be people of a very profane spirit, who do not esteem this a very great blessing, so must that Minister be who neglects it.

Whatever little esteem the generality of Christians may have for the work of the ministry, while they are in health, and at ease, yet when they are visited with sickness, or any grievous affliction, if they have any concern for their souls, they will see the need and the blessing of a faithful Pastor,—to support their dejected spirits, to direct them how to bear, and how to profit by their sufferings,—to examine the sincerity and the faith of dying penitents;—and, if he finds them truly such, to give them absolution, which the Spirit of God assures us shall have a real effect: “If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.”

In one word; the Ministers of the Gospel, and the Ordinances to them intrusted, are the ordinary means by which God does *teach, edify, bless, and save* his elect.

And although God can dispense with his own ordinances when he thinks fit, and save a sincere soul without them; yet it is most sure, he will never save that man who despise his ordinances, or wilfully neglects to make use of them, although administered by men of like passions with himself.

I will only mention one other great blessing of a standing Ministry. YE (saith our Saviour) ARE THE SALT OF THE EARTH; that is, ye are designed to preserve the world, as much as possible, from corruption, as salt does other bodies; and by that means prevent the judgments of God from falling upon them.

And it is most certain, (I wish we had not too sad a proof of it amongst ourselves) it is most certain, that the more the Ministers of God are despised, and the Ordinances of God neglected;—where Church Discipline is either contemned or discountenanced there iniquity will abound,—the kingdom of Satan will be re-established, and, as sure as we live, judgments will follow.

Thus I have set before you some of the many blessings, as well as the works, of a Minister of God. It is true, these blessings would be more visible, if every Minister of God would faithfully perform what his duty requires of him, and what he solemnly promised at his ordination.

But then consider, good Christians, that the personal failings of men do not make void the commission they have received from God. Even a civil magistrate, in things

\* Jam. v. 15.



lawful, is to be obeyed, because he has authority from above, though he should not be regular in his private life. It is the commission, the power, the business he is sent about, and the authority that sends him, which we are to look at, and not at the failings of the man.

Be assured of it, therefore, Christians, if you, on your part, do not hinder God's graces and blessings from falling upon you, God will certainly vouchsafe them to you upon the prayers of his own Ministers, and through the Ordinances by them administered.

'Do not,' saith Maimonides, 'say, what availeth the blessing of this simple Priest; for the blessing does not depend upon him, but upon the Most Holy God, who has ordained him to bless you.'

You see, therefore, the great profaneness of those, who go about to prostitute the Ordinances of God, by making them the common business of all Christians.

Well then, if the Minister of God does, with a real effect, bless all those that are disposed to receive his blessing, and repair to the Church to receive it; how unhappy are they, who, *for their sins*, are shut out of the Church, as well as they who deprive themselves of the blessing of God, by wilfully absenting from the public Ordinances.

Little do Christians consider what they lose by doing so.

You have seen, good Christians, our work and our burthen. You are, or may be, partakers of the blessings of our ministrations. Let us beseech you, not to add to our burthen, which is great enough, God knows, if we perform it as we should do;—do not add to our trouble, by despising our ministry, or make it useless to yourselves, by your ungodly lives.

When you remember, that we are Christ's Ministers, remember also, that the Master is always dishonoured when his servants are slighted.

It has always been the Devil's aim, to discountenance, by his agents, the Ministers of the Gospel; he knowing very well, that as bad as the world is, it would be ten times worse, if there were none to stand in the gap, none to tell men their duty, none to keep up order and discipline.

Suffer yourselves, Christian brethren, to be *instructed*,—to be *admonished*,—to be *reproved*, by those that are in Christ's stead. And if any of you should have the misfortune to fall into sins inconsistent with Christianity and Salvation, suffer yourselves to be *reformed* by godly discipline; and bless

God that he has appointed a sure way, if it is not your own faults, of restoring you to peace and pardon.

And if the duties of Christianity, or the difficulties of our proper callings, affright us, let us call to mind that Scripture question, "Who can dwell with everlasting burnings?" and all the difficulties we fear will vanish.

In short; this is the time in which we are to chuse what we are to be, and where we must be, to all eternity.

Christians may flatter themselves, that their salvation is in their own hands; and that they can make their peace with God when they please: They will find to their cost that they had a work to do, and to finish, even before they come to die.

It is an exceeding great comfort to the serious part of the living, when they can lay their dead friends in the grave, in sure and certain hopes of a blessed resurrection.

And blessed be God, that this is the case before us. This good man's *Life*, as a Christian, has been *unblameable*,—as a Pastor, for threescore years, *laborious* and *exemplary*; always *resident* upon his cure, always contented with his condition, and never eager to increase his work and his burthen, at the hazard of his soul.

But his life, his virtues, and his character, are so well known, not only to this congregation, but to this whole land, that I shall not injure his memory by recounting only a part of them.

One would only wish and hope, (if the evil tempers and times we are fallen into did not discourage us from hoping for it) that he may have many followers, as a *Christian*, as a *Minister of Christ*, as a *Neighbour*, and as a *Friend*; in all which capacities, he has most worthily discharged himself.

And now, his good name and his good works do follow him; and all we must follow him very soon, either with or without these witnesses of our behaviour in this world.

I have but one word or two more to add, First, to you, *my brethren*; and it is to put you, and myself, in mind of a truth which we shall all believe when we come to die;—that is, that our final sentence will, in a great measure, depend upon the *faithful discharge of our ministry*. What is our hope, saith St. Paul, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown, or rejoicing? Are not ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming;" that is, All the hope we shall then have, of our being accepted of

<sup>1</sup> 1 Theff. ii. 19.



God, is this,—That we have faithfully discharged our duty to the flock over which the Holy Ghost hath made us overseers. The care of our flocks must be our glory or our shame, our crown or our condemnation.

And with you, good Christians, who are our flock, I would leave this wholesome admonition of the Apostle:<sup>m</sup> “We beseech you, brethren, to know,” that is, acknowledge, “those which labour among you,

“and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly “for their works’ sake;” for it is *they* that must give an account; that they may do it with joy, and not with grief, for that will be no profit to you.

The good Lord grant that we may all so live, as that we may die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory; for the Lord Jesus’ sake. To whom, &c.

<sup>m</sup> 1 Theff. v. 12.

## S E R M O N XCIX.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF THE REVEREND DR. WALKER, VICAR-GENERAL, AND RECTOR OF BALLAUGH.

ST. PAUL’S COMFORT IN THE PROSPECT OF DEATH APPLICABLE TO EVERY FAITHFUL MINISTER OF CHRIST.

PHIL. i. 21.

*For to me to live is Christ; and to die is Gain.\**

**T**HAT is, to me, the motive I have to desire to live is the service of Christ; but to die in his service would be my greatest gain.

St. Paul shews, in these words, what a most comfortable prospect of death he had; that he was well assured he should be a gainer by it. He was ready and willing either to live or die, as it should be most for the glory of God and the good of his flock.

It will be well worth our pains to enquire,

*First*, Upon what foundation this assurance of St. Paul was founded.

And, *secondly*, Whether every Minister of Christ may not be able to say the same thing, and with some reasonable assurance, if it is not his own fault.

I. We will first enquire, *upon what foundation this comfortable assurance of St. Paul was built.*

And, in the first place, he himself tells us long before this, what was his greatest comfort in life:<sup>m</sup> “I have lived in all good “conscience before God unto this day;” that is, I ever sincerely followed the judgment of my conscience; I always acted according to the best light I had.

When I was a Jew; when I persecuted the church of Christ; “When I did many “things contrary to the name of Jesus,”—I did it through a firm persuasion that it was my duty to do so.

Why, will this justify any one who follows the judgment of a wrong-informed conscience? No, by no means; St. Paul himself tells us it will not. But he tells us, at the same time,<sup>n</sup> *that he obtained mercy*, even the grace of conversion; because what he had done amiss, he did it, not against knowledge, but ignorantly.

From whence we learn, what a dreadful thing it is, to act against knowledge and conscience;—that such are entirely out of the way of conversion, and are too often forsaken of God, and given over to a reprobate mind.

Whereas such as *act uprightly* are objects of the divine mercy, as St. Paul was, who, through God’s grace, became an instrument of the greatest good to the world, and at the same time to himself, so as to be able to say, TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.

That which makes the sight of death uneasy to flesh and blood, and frightful to others, makes it to *me* easy and comfortable, and even to be chosen and wished for.

What that was, we now come to consider. He was, in the first place, A SINCERE LOVER OF GOD, AND A LOVER OF SOULS.

We have the fullest instances of this in the account of his life, and in the several epistles he wrote; where he is ever and anon expressing his love and gratitude to God for the favours he had vouchsafed himself, and the church through his means. “I thank

<sup>m</sup> Acts xxiii. 1.

<sup>n</sup> 1 Tim. i. 13.

\* See Acts xx. 26. 2 Tim. iv. 8. 1 Theff. ii. 19. Phil. ii. 16.



"Christ Jesus the Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the Ministry."

And this, by the way, was the very first subject which this worthy person, and imitator of St. Paul, preached upon, when he entered into Holy Orders; ascribing to God his *ability*, his *vocation* to the Ministry, and all his holy purposes and resolutions to discharge his duty faithfully.

How faithfully he performed this, will be better understood by the loss his flock will have of him, than by any words of mine.

To return to St. Paul, and to the other reasons he had, *not to be afraid of dying*. TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.

St. Paul might very well say this, when he could make this appeal to his people, and to God: "Ye are witnesses, and God is witness, how holily, and justly, and unblameably, we behaved ourselves amongst you."

This is some comfort for a Minister of Christ when he comes to die;—when, for instance, he can say with truth, and with this Apostle, "I have kept a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards man."

When he can say with truth, "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God;" nor have suppressed any Christian truths through *ignorance, sloth, fear, or regard for man*; nor have I purchased my own ease, or temporal advantages, at the expence of the truth, or the dignity of my sacred calling.

When a man can say with truth, as the Apostle did, "I have wronged no man, I have corrupted no man, I have defrauded no man."

When he can truly tell the people of his flock, "that without ceasing he makes mention of them in his prayers."

That as he prays for a blessing upon his own labours, so he prays for a blessing upon theirs, upon their families, and upon their children.

When a Pastor has such a real love for his flock, as that he can truly say with the same Apostle, "Ye are in our heart to live and to die with you."

Such a Pastor cannot but hope, that such a love for his flock must recommend him to the love of Christ.

And such, by the way, was the love of your Pastor for you, good Christians, of this

parish; it was in his heart to live and to die with you.

A good proof of which is now to be seen amongst his papers; namely, a presentation to a very considerable living in Ireland, which was freely sent him, which yet he never would make use of.

This perhaps may not be credited, at least not much minded, by those whose hearts are set upon perfections;—who count their flock their own no longer than they can change them for a better, without any visible prospect of being more serviceable to God, to his church, or to the souls of men.

And yet most surely a time is coming when it will be more satisfaction, more profit to a Pastor, to have edified the poorest parish, than to have changed for the richest benefice, without an assurance of doing much more good; which is seldom, I fear, the case.

But to return to St. Paul, and the reasons he had for concluding that his death would be a gain to him.

He was called by Jesus Christ to the Ministry. He consulted not with flesh and blood, but was obedient to the heavenly call.

He became a true follower of Jesus Christ, both in his labours, and in his sufferings; and in his contempt of the world, its pleasures, profits, honours, and all its idols.

The opposition which the Gospel met with in every place did not hinder him from preaching it sincerely; and with what wonderful success God was pleased to bless his labours, the Christian world is sensible of.

As also with what a steady resolution he exercised the power of discipline committed to him by Jesus Christ, which is manifest from his delivering the incestuous Corinthian to Satan, notwithstanding the countenance he had even from some powerful Christians of that place.

In short; *his manner of life, his faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions, as he himself assures us, were well known to the church.*

So that he was possessed of all those qualifications which render a man "meet to be partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light."

And therefore he might with good assurance say, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

From all which it appears, That afflictions of any kind are so far from being a

<sup>o</sup> 1 Tim. i. 12. <sup>p</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 10. <sup>q</sup> Acts xxiv. <sup>r</sup> Acts xx. 27.

<sup>s</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 2. <sup>t</sup> Rom. i. 9. <sup>u</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 3.

<sup>x</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 8.



sign of God's displeasure, that they are distinguishing marks of his favour, to such as fear him;—that the faithful discharge of the duties of a man's proper state is one of the surest marks of his being in the way to happiness;—and lastly, that the troubles we meet with, whether in the way of our duty, or in the way of God's providence, are designed in mercy, to wean us from this world, to make us weary of its corruptions, and that we may desire to repose ourselves in the grave in hopes of a better life.

This was the case of our friend and brother lying dead before us; whose faith and patience having been exercised with a great variety of trials, and very uncommon, as well as very grievous afflictions; yet he never repined or charged God foolishly, but looked upon them as the effects of his mercy, and saw approaching death with that comfort, and steadiness of mind, that for my part, I wish may be my own case when I come to die.

II. This leads us to the *second particular*, which may be very proper to be enquired into, at this time; namely, *Whether every Minister of Christ may not, (if it is not his own fault) be able to say with St. Paul, and with some reasonable assurance, TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN.*

St. Paul was a man of like passions and infirmities with us;—of himself he could do no more towards working out his own salvation, than the weakest of us: He stood in need of, and was supported by the same grace which any of us may have for asking, provided we ask it with the same sincerity, and make use of the graces God has given us.

You have heard what it was which made the prospect of death a comfort to him; namely, an unwearied diligence in the duties of the Ministry, out of a principle of love to Christ, and for the souls of men.

Every Christian, as he hopes for Heaven when he dies, has a work upon his hands, and is bound to consider seriously what he came into the world for, and what will be expected from him.

But a Minister of Christ has others to answer for, as well as himself. And his salvation depends very much upon the salvation of his flock. "What is our hope?" (saith St. Paul) "are not even ye in the person of our Lord Christ at his coming?"

I shall, therefore, think this no improper occasion, when one of our brethren lies dead before us, to put the living in mind of their duty, and of the account we must give, when it comes to be with us as it is with him.

Now, the great business of our Lord Christ on earth being to establish the Christian religion; that is, to put mankind into the way of salvation; in order to this, he took our nature upon him, and made known to us, what God expected from us in order to fit us for Heaven and Happiness.

He made known to us the condition of the dead: That some are in Paradise waiting for an happy resurrection, and that others are reserved in chains of darkness until the judgment of the great day.

He appointed CERTAIN ORDINANCES, as sure means of grace and salvation to all such as should sincerely close with them.

And he appointed an order of men, whose duty and business it should be, at the peril of their souls, to administer these ordinances, to publish these glad tidings, and to pray for and bless his people in his name.

And as *your* salvation, good Christians, depends (under God) upon the ministry of those whom Jesus Christ has appointed to reconcile men unto God:—So, my brethren, you may see plainly, that *our* salvation depends upon a faithful ministration of these ordinances.

That as *stewards* over the household of God, you receive into his family, *by the sacrament of baptism*, all such as are prepared to become members thereof:

That as preachers of the Gospel, you endeavour to convince men, that being sinners, they do stand in need of God's mercy and pardon:

That you be instant in season, and out of season, to put your people in mind of their duty, which they are but too apt to forget:

To rebuke them when they do so, and to set before them the terrors of the world to come:

To comfort them with the promises of God in Christ, when they become sensible of their bad estate:

And to administer the Sacrament of Reconciliation to such, and to such only, as profess with hearty repentance and true faith to turn unto God.

Besides these, we have another very important duty incumbent upon us, (and I beseech you to consider it;) that is, we stand obliged, every one of us, to offer unto God every day the prayers of the church, every Pastor for his own flock.

To confess his own sins, and the sins of his people,—to praise God for the mercies he bestows upon them, and to beg God's protection and blessing upon them, and upon their labours.

That



That as they, by their daily labour, do minister to our necessities, so should we pray constantly for them

And that all such as by reason of *distance*, through *necessity*, or *worldly business*, are hindered from coming to church, may yet have a share in the blessings prayed for by their own Pastor.

In short; every Minister of Christ, who hopes to say with St. Paul, *TO ME TO DIE IS GAIN*, must be able to say with truth, and with him, *I AM CLEAR FROM THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN.*

In order to this, he must consider,

That he stands bound and answerable for a certain number of souls committed to his care;—to conduct them to eternal happiness, through a very corrupt world, infinite errors, and powerful enemies:—

That therefore he is to spare no pains for their good:—That he is to preach by his example, as well as by his sermons:—That he is to reprove the disorderly with an holy boldness,—to awaken the consciences of the careless by the terrors of the Lord,—and to comfort dejected penitents by the mercies of God in Jesus Christ:—That he is to silence gainfayers by the word of truth:—To be *the salt of the earth*, to keep as much as may be his own people from corruption.

In order to this, a good Minister of Jesus Christ will find himself obliged to subdue his own passions in the first place; to lay himself under greater restraints than he would lay others, doing nothing unbecoming the sanctity of his character, lest he lead his flock to hell, instead of conducting them to Heaven.

In one word; the Ministers of the Gospel, and the ordinances to them intrusted, and by them administered, are the ordinary means by which God does *teach, edify, bless*, and *save* his elect. And most certain it is, that their reward will be proportionable to their faithful endeavours for the salvation of their flock.

You have heard, good Christians, what our duty and business is. You are, or may be, partakers of the blessings of our ministrations.—Do not, for your own sakes, as well as for ours, add to our burthen, and to our sorrow, by despising our Ministry, or make it useless to yourselves by a profane neglect of the ordinances of God.

Remember, that we are the Ministers of Jesus Christ; and at the same time do not forget, that the master is always dishonoured when his servants are evil treated, or despised.

I have particularly insisted upon *our own duty*, being well assured, that if we fail in *our's*, you will be tempted to fail in *your's*.

And being also confident, that if we faithfully discharge *our own duty*, without any base or bye ends, without fearing the face of man;—if we perform the offices of religion with a devotion becoming so holy a work;—if our lives are answerable to the truths we are bound to preach, and to press upon others;—if we claim no other power or authority over you but what Christ has commanded for your good;—if we exercise no other discipline but such as we are directed to do by God's word, and by the laws of this church and nation;—then we may be confident, that God will accept our persons, and bless our labours, to your edification, and to our own eternal advantage.

And this, as I have the best reason to know, I do, as in the presence of God, affirm, was what our dead friend and brother ever aimed at, and made his constant practice.

He looked upon himself, by his ordination vows, bound to *minister the discipline of Christ as the Lord has commanded, and as this church and nation have received the same, according to the commandments of God.*

He was under the obligation of another solemn Oath, *as one of the council of this land, to the best of his power, to defend and maintain the antient laws, statutes, and customs, proper and belonging to the isle, and prerogatives due to the heirs thereof.*

He solemnly declared before he died, that, to the best of his understanding, he made these oaths his rule to act by. That he acted according to the best knowledge God had given him, for the honour of God, and the good of this church and nation.

And they are the worst enemies to themselves, if there are any to be found, who will say that he has not acted with *great integrity* in every branch of his duty, and state of life;—as a *most faithful, painful, tender* Pastor of the flock committed to his care;—as a most charitable disposer of his own and of the church's incomes;—as an uncommon benefactor to his parish, and to his unknown successors;—as a most dutiful son to his parents, and bountiful friend to his relations;—as a magistrate, entirely free from the least stain of corruption or partiality;—as a Christian, of irreproachable morals, and exemplary life and conversation;—as a most hospitable entertainer of strangers and persons in distress;—and lastly, as a very sincere friend, and most grateful person.

Would to God that every one who attends his funeral, may leave the world with the



same fair unstained character!—It is the best prayer I can put up for myself, or for those that hear me.

It is an exceeding great comfort to the serious part of the living, when they can commit the bodies of their dead friends to the grave, IN SURE AND CERTAIN HOPES OF A BLESSED RESURRECTION.

And, blessed be God, this is the case before us; as we have just reason to hope for, not only from the judgment of charity, but

from his works that follow him, as witnesses of his good life. And all we must follow him very soon, either with or without these testimonies of our good works.

Preserve in us all, O God, a lively sense of the world to come: And grant that we may so live, as that we may, with this our departed brother, die in peace, and rest in hope, and rise in glory, for the Lord Jesus' sake.

To whom, &c.



## S E R M O N C.

PREACHED AT THE FUNERAL OF THE RIGHT REVEREND FATHER IN GOD,  
THOMAS WILSON, LORD BISHOP OF SODOR AND MAN,

WHO DEPARTED THIS LIFE MARCH 7, 1755.

BY THE REVEREND PHILIP MOORE, RECTOR OF KIRK-BRIDE'S.

TO THE REVEREND DR. THOMAS WILSON, RECTOR OF ST. STEPHEN'S WALBROOK,  
PREBENDARY OF WESTMINSTER, CHAPLAIN TO HIS MAJESTY, &c.

S I R,

IN obedience to your request, I send you the Sermon preached at the Funeral of your most worthy Father, our late most excellent Bishop. I am very sensible of its inequality to the merits of so great and good a man; but for this, all just allowances will be made by the candid and ingenuous, when it is considered what disadvantages we labour under here, so remote from the sources of science and learning. In this view, it is submitted to your favour and indulgence, by, Sir,

Your very obedient humble servant, and sincere friend,

DOUGLAS, March 29, 1755.

PHILIP MOORE.

P S A L. cxii. 6.

*The righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance.*

IN this Psalm we have exemplified the character and description of a truly good and pious man; as also an account of the rewards which God has promised and annexed to his holiness and virtue.

The first and principal part of his character is, that *he fears God*; which is the beginning of all true wisdom, and the sure foundation of all virtue and goodness. The second, *his obedience to the divine commandments*. For thus we have it: "Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, that delighteth greatly in his commandments."

The next part of the good man's character is, his *beneficence* and *justice* to mankind; according to ver. 4, "He is merciful, loving, and righteous."

Another valuable part of his character is, his *prudence* and *good œconomy* in the management of his affairs and words; for those "he will guide with discretion."

The conclusive part of his character is, *his charity*. "The good man is merciful, and lendeth. He hath dispersed abroad, and given to the poor."

This, I say, is a short sketch of the *good man's character*, as pointed out and described in this Psalm. Let us next observe and see the rewards promised him.

First, and in general, that he is *blessed*; blessed with such a competency of wealth

and honour, as God in his wisdom sees necessary, proper, and convenient, for his rank and station in the world. This is as much as any man can reasonably expect, and much more than the worthiest, and most deserving, can properly merit.

Secondly; he is blessed with tranquility and peace of mind in all stations of life, from a fixed and determined assurance of the divine protection. He enjoys that peace of God which passeth all understanding,—that peace, which as the world cannot give, so neither can it take away. His heart is stablished, and will not shrink: "For his heart standeth fast, and confideth in the Lord."

A good man's security for happiness is founded on the promises of God; which never did, nor ever will, fail or disappoint the man that trusted in him. For though many may sometimes be the troubles of the righteous, yet God, in mercy, finally delivers him out of all.

If we take the generality of good, of charitable, and pious men, we shall, on comparison, find them evermore easier, happier, and more secure in their stations, than wicked and oppressive men, who can have no claim to the divine protection.

That the man who rests secure on the providence of God, will neither be lightly elated with prosperity, nor much dejected with



with grief or fear, on a change of his condition.

That neither the assaults of wicked men, nor wicked Spirits, can vanquish his integrity; for that will he hold fast, and not let it go; his heart shall not reproach him as long as he lives.

When any calamity or distress befalls him, he is not borne down with the sudden shock; but his hopes and spirits are supported by his firm dependance on a good and gracious God; whose dispensations, however seemingly severe, he knows, and is assured, are ultimately intended for his greater good, and, in the end, will be infinitely more to his advantage, than if left entirely to the direction of his own choice. "For surely, the righteous shall not be moved for ever." For death, instead of removing, fixes him in an eternal state of happiness, glory, and immortality. This is the grand point in view;—the sole end of all his hopes, all his labours;—the crown and perfection of his personal happiness.

He is not only happy and blessed in his own person, but in every thing else that belongs to him, his relations, his friends, and dependants.

But above, and beyond all these, he is blessed in that happy memorial of a good and excellent name, which he leaves behind him amongst men. For "the memory of the just is blessed:" And, "the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance."

And this is just the case and character of this great and good man, our Right Reverend and most worthy Father in God, whose funeral we are here assembled to solemnize.

I shall not pretend to give you here a history of his life; that will require more consideration than the shortness of the present time will allow me.

It will require a much abler hand to do this subject justice, and better information than I can at present procure.

I shall therefore bespeak your favour and indulgence, whilst I attempt to lay before you some considerations tending to shew, how greatly, how eminently, this great and worthy personage was qualified with all the requisites that compose the essential character of a good and excellent man, as described in this Psalm from whence the text is taken.

And in consequence of this, that he is entitled, through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, to the general reward of that blessedness, which God has promised to all good and righteous men.

The first part of the righteous man's character in this Psalm, is, his true sense of religion founded on right notions, and a true belief of the being and attributes of God; his power, his wisdom, his justice, his goodness, &c.

Now, all the world, that knew the Right Reverend Deceased, must likewise know, that these were the great motives and principles of all his actions,—how much he had them at heart,—with what active zeal and diligence he promoted the cause of God and his Christ;—regular and uniform in the whole course and tenor of a long life,—and invariable in the practice of every virtue,—he gave to mankind a conspicuous proof and example of his being a most sincere and excellent Christian: Which justifies the character given of him by a very ingenious and learned writer still living\*, who, vindicating the cause of Christianity, and exposing the evil design and tendency of such writers as the authors of the Independent Whig, in their false and unworthy aspersions of so worthy a man, expresses himself thus:—"And who is their bad clergyman? Why, the Bishop of Man; than whom no age of Christianity, nor of the world, hath ever produced a more faithful and exemplary Pastor, nor a more upright man."

The greatest enemies of Christianity will acknowledge, that the religion which our Saviour came to teach and establish amongst men, gives us the most noble and exalted notions of God,—the fullest and clearest knowledge of the duties we owe him,—and the most powerful motives to love, to fear, to honour, and obey him: That its precepts and instructions are all calculated to promote the practice of moral virtue, and in consequence of this, the general good and happiness of all mankind.

This is that true religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, which this venerable Prelate most carefully studied, excellently understood, and most firmly believed; this he cultivated and promoted by all his endeavours.

As Bishop of this Diocese, and a member of the society for promoting Christian Knowledge, what infinite service, what great good, has he not done, by his indefatigable labours, by his useful and most excellent writings; which will be read and admired with pleasure and comfort, for the divine instructions they contain, as long as the English language shall be understood, and the Christian religion shall be taught in its native purity, in sincerity, and in truth.

His Writings teach nothing but the plain genuine truths of Christianity, in their original simplicity, without ever concerning himself

\* Mr. Skelton, in his *Deism Revealed*, part 2, page 271.



himself in those particular controversies and disputes which disturb and divide the Christian world. So that all Christians, of all denominations, may read his works, not only without offence, but also with the greatest comfort and advantage to themselves. His stile and language is adapted to the understanding and capacity of all orders and degrees of men, at the same time that he delivered his sentiments with all the dignity and authority of an inspired Apostle.

Such good principles, and so well established, were productive of a strict and steady observance of all the commands of God; and of that faith which worketh by love, that love of God, exemplified in his universal love, his charity and regard for all mankind. And this will shew, how justly he merits the character and description of such an excellent person as is pointed out to us in this Psalm; viz. "that he is merciful;" that is, charitable, loving, and righteous; "that he hath dispersed abroad, and given "to the poor."

That our Right Reverend deceased Father in God was highly eminent and distinguished for this most excellent gift, this divine grace of charity, and bond of every other virtue, this audience, and the whole island, can bear me witness.

His tenderness and compassion were equally great to the souls and to the bodies of men, in proportion to the respective value of both; insomuch, that when he was obliged by duty and conscience to exercise the discipline of the church against an offender, it was in such a manner, that, as God says of himself, *it was his strange work*;—it was a force on the humanity and tenderness of his heart, a work that he undertook with reluctance, and with regret. I have often seen him more afflicted for, and affected with, the faults and miscarriages of an offender, than the offender himself; mingling his prayers and his tears with his admonitions and intreaties.

He had, like his great Master and Saviour Jesus Christ, a real compassion and tenderness for the weaknesses and infirmities of human nature, as well as for the misfortunes of men. For all, in affliction, in adversity, and distress, he had the tenderest sensibility of heart; for in every man's affliction, like his Saviour, he was afflicted.

He not only considered them with compassion, but according to their necessities, whether of body or soul, relieved, comforted, and supplied their wants. Like a faithful and true shepherd of Jesus Christ, he was for many years, even to the utmost period of his life, the best and only Physi-

cian both for the souls and bodies of the people committed to his care.

But his charity and beneficence to the poor and needy, shine the brightest and most distinguished of all his other numerous virtues and graces. Feeding the hungry, cloathing the naked, comforting the afflicted, administering to the distresses of all, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.

These acts of Humanity and Christian Charity were the joy, the delight, the great employment and pleasure of his soul. And to this it was owing, that during his episcopate, no country in the Christian world had fewer publick beggars to be seen therein; for he kept the poor from almost every body's doors but his own.

It was a common saying with him, when told that some abused and misapplied his charities, that he would rather ten unworthy persons should do so, than that one worthy object should go away unrelieved on that account.

But because some through ignorance, or some worse cause, have taken it upon them to speak lightly of and under-rate his charities, I shall adduce some very authentic testimonies from private minutes of his own, which very lately fell into my hands, in support and confirmation of what I advance. Testimonies which, at this time of day, nobody can pretend to dispute; as the originals are to be seen under his own hand, in these words:—

*' Knowsley, Easter-Day, 1693. It having pleased God to blefs me with a temporal income, far above my hopes and deserts, and having hitherto given but a tenth of my incomes; I do for the future purpose to give one fifth part.'*

You are to observe, that this he did, before he was Bishop of Man, while he was a domestick chaplain to the Earl of Derby, and tutor to Lord Strange.

But afterwards, in the year 1716, Jan. 6; the festival of the Epiphany, in the nineteenth year of his episcopate, he makes another very solemn dedication to God, in the following words:

*' Finding that I have enough, and to spare, over and above a decent hospitality, besides what I formerly gave to pious uses, and being convinced, that I am no proprietor, but only a steward of the Church's patrimony; I do therefore, to the glory of God, dedicate three tenths of my rents to pious uses, and one tenth of all the profits of the demesnes, and two tenths of the profits of my English estate, until I can purchase the impropriations of that estate, which*



‘ which I intend to do ; and after that, one tenth besides.’—His next dedication is dated

‘ *Bishop’s-Court, Feb. 18, 1718.* I find, to the glory of God, by constant experience, that God will be no man’s debtor. I find I have enough, and to spare, so that for the future, I dedicate four tenths to pious uses, one tenth of the demefnes and customs, which I receive in monies, and of my English estate as above : And the good Lord accept his poor servant, for Christ’s sake. Amen.’

And again,

‘ *Bishop’s-Court, St. Thomas’s-Eve, 1721.* To the glory of God, I dedicate the interest of all my monies to pious uses, so long as I have wherewithal to live on besides. Blessed be God for giving me the heart and will to do so.’—His last and most solemn dedication that I find, is dated

‘ *Bishop’s-Court, Dec. 23, 1722.* I made the above dedications when I had enough, and to spare ; and this I did in a grateful return to God, for the undeserved bounties he had heaped upon me.’

He then makes some reflections, over which I would here draw a veil ; and then proceeds thus :—

‘ He is the same great and good God, who can either shorten my troubles, lessen my expences, or make good my losses in another life ; in sure confidence of which, and as a testimony of my firm faith in his power, truth, and goodness, I do for the future dedicate five tenths of all my ecclesiastical rents to pious uses, and the rest as above. And blessed be the good Spirit of God, who at this time has put this thing into my heart.’ And then he concludes with this modest and humbling reflection : ‘ A very small page will serve to contain the number of our good works, when large volumes will not contain our evil deeds.’

The time and your patience would fail me, were I to enumerate half the good works he has done, both of a publick and private nature, since the happy æra of his being Bishop of this Diocese. But most of them are now so visible and conspicuous, that they bear testimony to themselves.

Though confined, by his own choice, to this obscure corner of the world, in the little Diocese of Man, yet his honest fame and reputation were well known all over the Christian world ; being spoken of with the highest honour, reverence, and esteem, by all orders and degrees of men. And now, that he is no more amongst men, yet *this righteous man will be had in everlasting remembrance.*

But that I may not be thought partial, or to exaggerate his character, from that filial piety and personal love which all his Clergy must retain for this truly divine and apostolic man ; I shall adduce some unexceptionable testimonies of his worth and honour, published to the world long before his death.

In Counsellor Harris’s edition of Sir James Ware’s works, printed in Dublin, 1755, speaking of the several great and learned men educated in Ireland, amongst the rest, he makes very honourable mention of this worthy prelate : ‘ Thomas Wilfon, D. D. and now Bishop of Sodor and Man, was born in 1663, at Burton, near Chester, in which city he had his school education, and from thence was sent to the university of Dublin, where he took the degree of Batchelor of Arts, and continued in it, till the disturbance of King James’s reign drove him into England, where he became curate to his uncle, Dr. Richard Sherlock, rector of Winwick, in Lancashire. After some years he was made tutor to the Lord Strange, son to the Earl of Derby, and afterwards was, against his will, promoted by the said Earl to the Bishoprick of Man, and consecrated by Dr. Sharpe, Archbishop of York, assisted by the Bishops of Chester and Norwich, on the 16th of January 1697 ; and on the 3d of March following, was created Doctor of Divinity, in a full congregation at Oxford. He immediately passed into the isle of Man, having first, by the assistance of Dr. Thomas Bray, collected such a number of practical books, as to enable him to found parochial libraries in every parish in his Diocese. He has resided there ever since, in great reputation for his piety, exemplary life, and hospitality.’—So far this historian.

In a description of Great-Britain, &c. London, published in folio, I find the following account ; where the author, speaking of the Isle of Man, expresses himself thus :

‘ The only book published in their language, [the Manks] is an exposition of the Church Catechism, wrote by their present pious and most worthy Bishop, who has sat in that See forty-eight years, (*it is now fifty-eight, above half a century!*) with great dignity and honour ; and whenever he dies, will be the most sensible loss that poor country ever felt. Since the death of Dr. Hough, late Bishop of Worcester, the Bishop of Man is the oldest Bishop (either Protestant or Popish) in the Christian world ; and to say all in a word, he is a truly primitive Bishop.’

The last testimony I shall produce to the character of this bright and shining luminary of the Christian church shall be (if I mistake



mistake not) from one of the authors of the Candid Disquisitions, who, if we are rightly informed here, are some of the brightest and most learned men of the present age. Their design, as I understand, is to have a review of the Liturgy with some proposed alterations and amendments, as well in that, as in the discipline of the church; where, treating of both as practised under the administration of our most venerable deceased Father in God, they conclude with this affectionate and pathetic apostrophe:—

‘Happy island! May thy most worthy Bishop live, and continue, with the assistance of his God, to make thee an example of true religion and holiness to all the islands and kingdoms of the world. May his works also live, and the good effects of them continue to a thousand generations. When he has been long dead, he will yet speak, and the happy influence of his works will remain in this world, whilst he is enjoying the glorious rewards of them in another. May I live the life of that righteous man, and may my latter end and state of eternity be like his!’

It is a very unusual thing to have so many publick testimonies borne to the worth and character of any person, during his life:—A tribute which is never paid but to very uncommon and extraordinary merit.

I shall now just bespeak your patience, whilst I pay my own mite to such superior excellence, by drawing such a character of him, in a few words, as I hope, and am persuaded, ye will all say, and believe, he most justly merits.

After what has been already said, I have little more left to say, than that he was an honour to humanity, and added dignity to the nature of man.

He gave the world a living example of the divine power and efficacy of Christianity, of which his whole life was a most lively transcript.

He was a person whose integrity was inflexible, his holiness pure, and his piety fervent; of admirable probity and simplicity of manners; of a most engaging behaviour, affability, and sweetness of temper.

His piety, beneficence, and charity, will be remembered and recorded by the people of this Isle, with gratitude and affection, to the remotest generations. In his private conversation he was agreeable and entertaining; lively and facetious, without levity; and always consistent with the dignity of his character; never at a loss for something pertinent and proper to embellish and illustrate his discourse; on these occasions, nothing ever proceeded from his mouth but

what was good, to the use of edifying, and ministered not only grace, but also pleasure and delight to the hearers; insomuch, that I have heard several gentlemen, who were themselves very good judges of men and manners, declare, that they never met with any man in whom there was a more agreeable and happy inter-mixture of the polite and well-bred gentleman, with the grave, the learned, and sensible divine.

Free from all ambition but that of doing good in this happy Diocese to which the providence of God had first called him, he modestly declined all offers and opportunities of advancing himself to a higher station in the church, though fully accomplished with every qualification that would have adorned the highest.

As a Minister of the Gospel, though a Prelate of the first rank and dignity amongst us, yet, in the work of his high calling, he was diligent and industrious as the meanest labourer in Christ’s vineyard, never sparing himself, whenever the necessities of the Church, which happened but too often, required his personal labour and assistance. Like a faithful and wise Pastor, he fed the people committed to his charge with plain and wholesome instructions suited to their capacities and understanding; from which spiritual employment he never desisted, till compelled to resign to the infirmities of age, and the inevitable decays of nature.

To his Clergy he behaved with all the tenderness and condescension of a Father, and with the love and affection of a fellow-labourer, and a brother.

He retained, even to the last, that inward peace and cheerfulness of temper,—that admirable composure and serenity of mind,—which were the temporal rewards of his piety and goodness, and the inseparable companions of his whole life.

The testimony of his conscience, that in sincerity and godly simplicity he had his conversation in this world, inspired him with that singular patience and resignation, that firm affiance in the mercies of God, thro’ Jesus Christ, and that full assurance of hope in his promises, which supported his spirits under the languishments and decays of old age, and sweetened to him, at last, even the bitterness of death itself.

Thus lived this excellent person, beloved, admired, and esteemed;—and thus he died, universally lamented and deplored by all who had the honour and the happiness of his acquaintance;—and of whom, we may very justly and truly say, that he has left behind no superiors in virtue and goodness,—but few, very few, his equals.

May



May his memory be dear, and his example instructive to us all, that so following (every man in his station) the steps of this and all the other saints and servants of God, in all virtuous and godly living, we may, with them, partake in those unspeakable joys, which God in his ineffable mercy has prepared for all those that unfeignedly love

him,—live in his fear,—and die in his favour; through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour.

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all might, majesty, and dominion, adoration and praise, now and to eternal ages. Amen.



T H E E N D.





